15¢

SPY

NOVELS MAGAZINE

June

The CAPITOL CRIME
Novel of Intrigue
By MAJOR GEORGE F. ELIOT

AMBASSADOR OF DEATH
Complete Spy Novel
By FREDERICK C. PAINTON

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29x5.25-19	2.95	1.15
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28x5.50-18	3.35	1.15
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.15
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.15
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.15
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.25
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31x6.50-19	3.60	1.35
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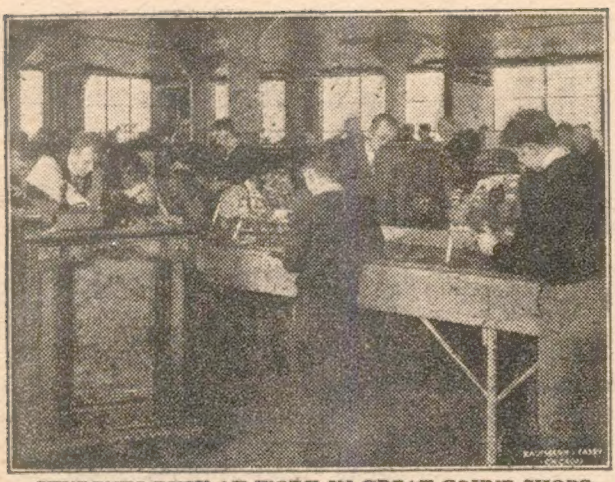

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SPY NOVELS MAGAZINE

A. A. WYN
Editor

H. M. WISMER
Associate Editor

Vol. 1 JUNE, 1935 No. 3

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Unless that Navy lieutenant could escape the threat of lurking shadows and poisoned blades, he would be dead before the sun again blistered the streets of Manila—and the fate of the U. S. Fleet would be in enemy hands.

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AMBASSADOR OF DEATH (Novel) ..... **Frederick C. Painton** **95**

Only Barney Trale would have tried to set up a new king in the smouldering Balkans—for it was part of that American's grim work to face the daily threat of the firing squad.

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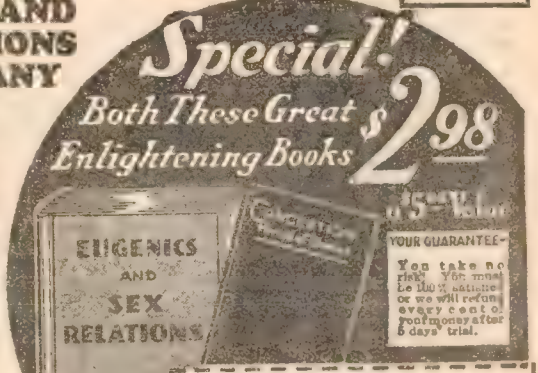
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THE MANILA MENACE

Lieutenant Morton stared with unbelieving eyes. Datu Dak reeled from the impact of Lopez's bullets—yet he came steadily on, his poisoned kris poised to strike a death-blow.

CHAPTER I

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

THREE men sat in a torrid room, which many electric fans could not make comfortable. Heat, dank and oppressive, weighed upon them, turning crisp pongees and linens into clinging, clammy garments. Manila, at the change of the monsoons, was a place of torment, even to the native.

In spite of the oppressive heat, however, the three were tautly alert. Menace poised above them, threatening first one, then the other. Admiral Hilary Gray, commander-in-chief of the American Asiatic squadron, was the eldest. His blue eyes were icy as they appraised the lean, angular face of Senator Ernesto Lopez, a member of the Philippine congress, who sat on the opposite side of the table.

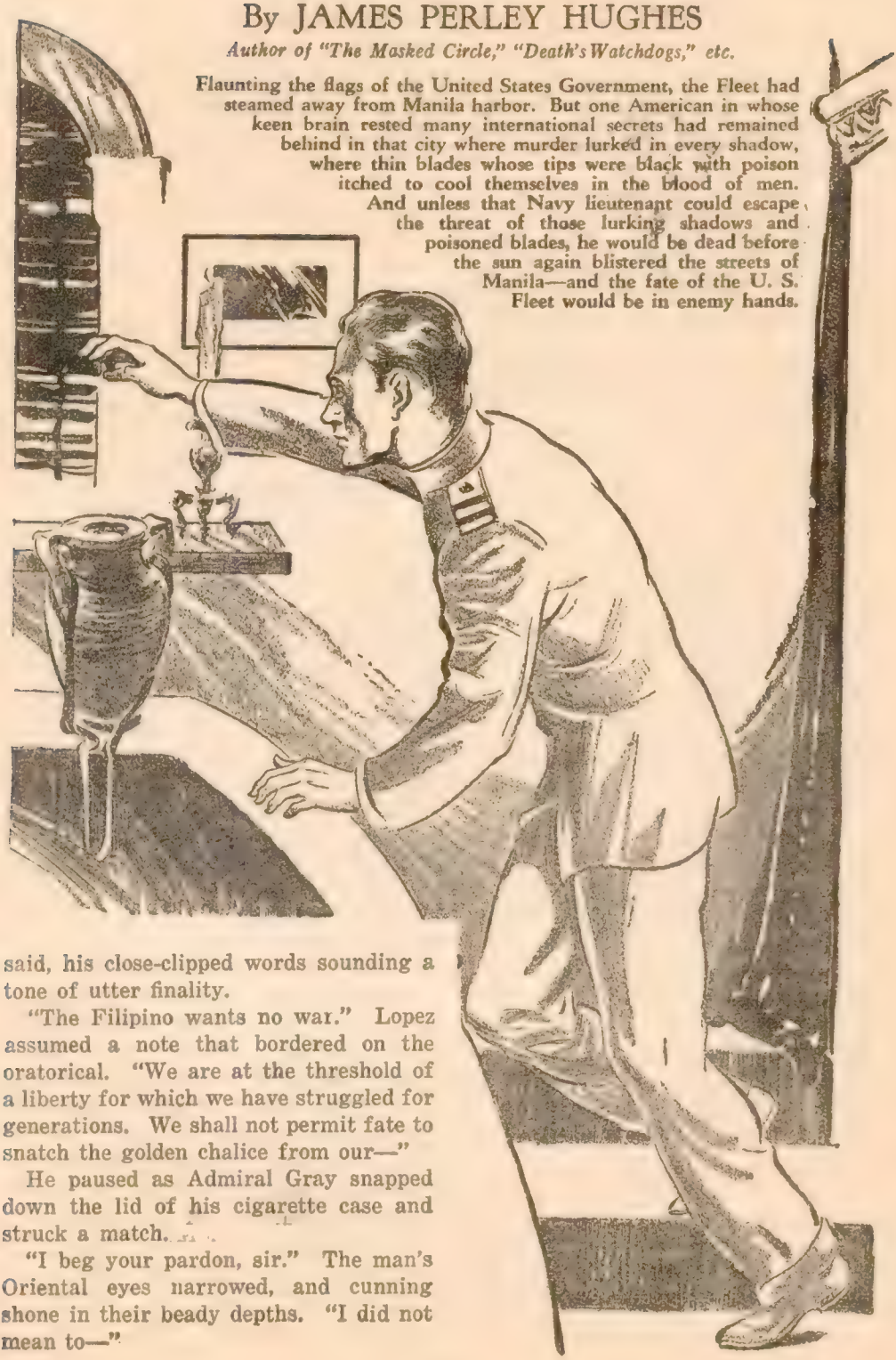
"We are not going to allow your government to get us into war," the admiral

Gripping Spy Novel

By JAMES PERLEY HUGHES

Author of "The Masked Circle," "Death's Watchdogs," etc.

Flaunting the flags of the United States Government, the Fleet had steamed away from Manila harbor. But one American in whose keen brain rested many international secrets had remained behind in that city where murder lurked in every shadow, where thin blades whose tips were black with poison itched to cool themselves in the blood of men. And unless that Navy lieutenant could escape the threat of those lurking shadows and poisoned blades, he would be dead before the sun again blistered the streets of Manila—and the fate of the U. S. Fleet would be in enemy hands.



said, his close-clipped words sounding a tone of utter finality.

"The Filipino wants no war." Lopez assumed a note that bordered on the oratorical. "We are at the threshold of a liberty for which we have struggled for generations. We shall not permit fate to snatch the golden chalice from our—"

He paused as Admiral Gray snapped down the lid of his cigarette case and struck a match.

"I beg your pardon, sir." The man's Oriental eyes narrowed, and cunning shone in their beady depths. "I did not mean to—"

"That's all right, senator. I just wanted you to understand that the United States cannot be tricked into war. You fellows asked for liberty. Now you have it."

The admiral shoved back his chair and made a signal to a tall young man whose eyes were as blue as his own. Spotless in the white uniform of the tropics, Kit Morton had about him a cool freshness that even the dank humidity of Manila could not dampen. Ernesto Lopez studied him as he arose and gathered up the papers to which Admiral Gray had referred in the course of the conversation. The Filipino had watched Morton even more closely than the fleet commander. His astonished ears had heard the young man read off details of plots that he had been sure none knew outside of a small circle of natives belonging to his own party.

Morton met his stare serenely.

"The fleet sails for Hongkong Thursday morning," Admiral Gray announced, when all three were on their feet. "I hope nothing untoward happens while we are away."

The Filipino bowed and smiled. "I assure you, in the name of all patriotic citizens of my beloved country," he began, "that—"

"That's fine. Well, good luck—and good-bye." The admiral held out his hand.

Ernesto grasped the extended palm. In spite of the heat, his own was clammily cold. But even as he spoke formal words of gratitude and farewell, he kept his gaze upon the slim young man who acted as Admiral Gray's aid. His slitted eyes were photographing Kit Morton, feature by feature. Behind those eyes, his cunning brain was planning swiftly.

"And *bon voyage* to you, lieutenant," he said.

Morton bowed stiffly.

"Thank you, senator." He brought up his arm in a smart salute. "I hope I shall meet you again some time."

"The pleasure will be mutual." Lopez smiled and summoned a servant to escort the visitors to their car.

AS the two Americans departed, Ernesto Lopez gave a signal that brought a man from behind the curtains that hung on either side of the windows on the opposite side of the room. Like Lopez, Pablo Wong was a Filipino, but he was Chinese rather than a Spanish *mestizo*. He was a blending of two Oriental races, while the senator was half-European.

"You heard?" Lopez asked in Spanish.

"*Si, señor.*"

"You saw the younger?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"He must be killed before the fleet sails. He knows too much, and what he does not know, he suspects. No dagger, no gun, no poison which will attract attention, but—"

"*Si, señor.*"

Pablo Wong bowed and hurried down the hall in the opposite direction from that taken by Admiral Gray and Lieutenant Morton. Pablo had aided Ernesto Lopez to power along a steep path that was marked by more than one opponent's grave. The senator watched him until he had disappeared into the servants' quarters. Then he returned to the room in which the conference had been held. He lifted the colorful mantilla that covered the table, to disclose a hidden dictaphone. A smile deepened the lines upon his yellow-brown face.

"That is all. You may disconnect," he said into the microphone.

He lighted another cigarette and looked dreamily into the blue smoke that poured from his nostrils. He had tricked the admiral commanding the American fleet, had forced him into declaring that the United States could not be lured into war. He had a phonograph record of that conversation. Now he was ready for the next move. He stepped to the telephone and called a number.

"Is Count Watenabe there?" he asked.

After a pause, a new voice sounded over the wire. Ernesto Lopez spoke in a throaty whisper.

"Meet me at the tea house in half an hour," he said. "I got what I was looking for."

He listened to staccato words, and his head nodded vigorously.

"Yes, he was there, but I told Pablo to take care of him. . . . Yes, I know, but it will be handled—professionally."

Lopez replaced the telephone, and gave a satisfied smile. He was pleased with his success. Born of a Spanish soldier and a native woman, he had fought his way to a position of power and authority. Now ambition was tugging at his sleeve and pointing to even greater heights.

He descended to the street, where a motor awaited him. As he crossed the palm-fringed sidewalk, a ragged beggar held out an importunate hand.

"*Dame un centavito por l'amor de Dios* —give me a tiny cent, for God's love," the man whined.

Lopez dropped a coin into the outstretched palm. His mind was filled with the meeting he was to have with Count Watenabe, and he did not notice that the filthy turban on the beggar's head was wound in a manner worn only by a *datu* of the head-hunting Moros.

The motor car glided from the curb, and Ernesto Lopez leaned back against the cushions, dreaming of power and still more power. But as his car swept away and headed for the Escolta, the ragged beggar spat upon the coin which had been dropped into his palm. His thin, brown fingers caressed a tiny *kris* hidden in the folds of his cummerbund, while he muttered a fierce Mohammedan oath.

MANILA sweated beneath a brazen sky, but the torrid heat failed to slow the swift precision of Kit Morton's steps, when once he and Admiral Gray were free from the presence of Ernesto Lopez. The fleet commander's face was grave, but no worry showed in his blue eyes. He had given Lopez his message. The United States of America was not to be inveigled into war.

Morton, however, sensed the dark forces that he and other members of the Navy Intelligence Corps were facing. Bluff and frank, the admiral believed his warning would be sufficient, but Kit had dug too deeply into the Oriental mind to be satisfied with even the official assurances of a Filipino senator.

"I think I'd better stay over, sir," he told his chief, when they neared the quay where the admiral's barge awaited them.

"Perhaps—just to see that nothing happens."

"Plenty is going to happen, sir. It's just a question of how far they'll go."

"Aren't you just a little—" The commander paused.

Kit Morton shook a gloomy head. His uneasy eyes looked into those of his chief. "Lopez had a dictaphone rigged up in that room, sir," he said.

"Yes, I observed that. That was why I was so positive."

"And there was a man back of the curtain—a man with a *kris*."

"I didn't notice him." Gray's voice was even. "Why should he want to kill me?"

"I'm the one elected," Morton grinned. "Lopez thinks I know more than I do. That's why I must stay, sir. If there's more to know, I've got to find it out."

The admiral nodded slowly. They had reached the quay where the commander's barge was waiting. Soon they would be on the flagship, leaving the baking streets of Manila for the comparative cool of the bay.

"I'll not make it an order, Kit," the older man said, "for it would look as though I were sending you to certain death without sufficient reason. They're a mean lot—that Lopez crowd."

"May I go as a volunteer?"

"Yes, but you'd better come aboard with me and leave—unofficially."

Morton's grin returned. "That's what I had in mind, sir. In fact, I've already radioed that schooner I used before. Ralph Dayton is bringing it up from Cavite."

The commander-in-chief chuckled, and put a friendly hand on Morton's shoulder. Then they entered the barge, and the motor hummed as they raced through the waves toward the flagship.

Kit Morton sat silent, gazing across the water. His eyes were no longer on the blazing white of the Manila water-

front. They were centered on the bulky silhouette of a cruiser anchored on the other side of the bay. Instead of the starry banner of the republic, the blazing sun of Nippon floated lazily from the taffrail. About the ship swarmed several score of *sampans*, their owners selling fish and fruit to the Japanese sailors.

Admiral Gray followed his aid's glance. He took up a pair of binoculars and held them to his eyes. For a moment he studied the busy scene, then handed the glasses to Kit Morton.

"See anything unusual?" he asked.

THE young man looked through the high-powered lenses. He focussed them more carefully.

"You mean—they're serving tea to—"

"Yes, to *sampan* sailors. Officers entertaining—just whom would you say they were entertaining, Kit?"

The young man laid the glasses down. They were nearing the gray hulk of the *California*, Admiral Gray's flagship.

"I'd say that's another thing for me to find out, sir," he said in a sober tone. "Of course, the *Asuma* is a reserve cruiser, sir, and—"

"She's an old ship, I know, but I think your idea of staying is a good one. There's a lot going on that needs looking into. Remember, my orders are to keep hands off."

"Yes, sir, but suppose—"

"The only thing—hey, there, hard aport! What the devil? Look out there, Kit—that drunken—"

There was a crash as a careening motorboat struck their craft a blow that sent its teakwood prow through the barge's ribs and at the same time hurled it upon its beam ends. Admiral Gray had seen the oncoming racer only in time to bellow a warning. In another moment, he and Kit Morton were in the water.

They saw the yellow face of a Chinese *mestizo* swimming toward them. In his hands was a small *kris*, a Malay weapon in Cantonese fingers. Pablo Wong had struck, but his blow had missed. Now he was turning to a more ancient, but more reliable weapon.

"Look out, Kit! He's making for you and—" Morton heard the admiral sputter. The rest of the words were lost.

Kit dived. Although fettered by his uniform, he struck for a depth that would take him well under the oncoming native. He opened his eyes and looked up, to see Wong's threshing legs almost above him. A stroke or two forced Kit upward. He reached out and grasped Pablo by the ankle. Then he swam down with all his strength.

Morton's counter-attack had caught the *mestizo* by surprise. He was dragged beneath the surface before he had a chance to fill his lungs. His first realization was that he must quickly free himself or drown. The *kris* was a weapon he could use below as well as above the surface. He doubled himself and struck at Morton's arm, but a twist made him miss.

He kicked desperately, but Morton's powerful strokes kept dragging him down. The naval officer had all the skill of the Chinese and double his strength. Wong's struggles grew weaker. The *kris* slipped from his hand and sank. He saw an arm reach out and grasp it, and he tried to fend off the blow. His mouth filled with water; his lungs became flooded. Consciousness ebbed, and darkness blotted out the light that streamed through the translucent waters.

As Pablo Wong's limp body slithered downward, Kit Morton struck for the surface with all the force of his wide shoulders and powerful legs. He shot into the air, armpits high, to see half a dozen sailors swimming about him. Two were aiding Admiral Gray toward a whaleboat that had been dropped from the *California's* davits. Both the barge and the powerful motorboat which had struck it were gone.

Friendly hands helped Morton into a cutter, and a few minutes later, both he and the admiral were on the *California's* broad decks. A curious frown had gathered between the eyes of the commander-in-chief. He started down a companionway to his cabin, then paused.

"That fellow must have gone *jura-*

mentado," he said to Kit Morton. "I thought it was an accident at first, but when he started after you with that *kris,* I changed my mind."

The younger officer grinned and handed the *kris* to his chief.

"Keep it as a souvenir, sir," he said.

"But who could he have been?" Gray questioned.

"He was the man who was behind the curtain while we were talking to Ernesto Lopez," Morton answered.

CHAPTER II

Hive of Intrigue

ERNESTO LOPEZ did not keep his rendezvous with Count Watenabe until he had witnessed the crash between the high-powered racing yawl piloted by Pablo Wong and the barge conveying Admiral Gray to the battleship *California.* When both had disappeared beneath the waves, the Filipino signed to his chauffeur to continue. A complacent smile thinned the man's lips.

Turning off the Escolta, the car wormed its way through narrow, winding streets. The honk of its horn was incessant. Ernesto Lopez was recognized by many, and cheers greeted him at almost every corner. To the unlettered natives of that section, he was the "father of liberty" and "protector of the poor." A demagogue from his first entry into the maze of Filipino politics, he still continued to play upon the emotional qualities of his people.

Reaching a street corner, he ordered his chauffeur to stop, and he alighted to mingle with the crowds, pausing now and then to give alms to the ubiquitous beggars who thronged the streets of the Philippine capital. Pressing deeper into the maze of crooked streets, he entered a section in which there were more Japanese that Filipinos. He paused at a tea house and after a glance around, he entered the vestibule. A kimono-clad maid bent low to remove his shoes and slip on the straw slippers worn by all patrons of Nipponese tea houses. Then she conducted him to a tiny private dining room overlooking a toy garden wherein a fountain played.

"Saki, Kiku San," Lopez ordered when a serving maid appeared. "Rice wine, O Honorable Flower."

Lopez was sipping from a tiny porcelain cup when the sliding door was noiselessly opened and Kiku San ushered in a short, thin little man whose brown skin and bristling mustache marked him a son of Dai Nippon. Lopez arose, and the two bowed with stilted courtesy. Then both squatted on the floor and took up saki cups.

"A toast—you give toast?" Count Watenabe smiled at his companion.

"To the Asiatic Empire," Ernesto offered, "and destruction to our natural enemies."

The count bowed until his forehead touched the mat upon which he was seated. Then the two began to talk. Although Lopez had a smattering of Japanese and Watenabe spoke some Spanish, their conversation was in English. Each weighed his words carefully, for both were filled with suspicion.

"American fleet sails Thursday for Hongkong," Count Watenabe reminded Lopez. "Business can then be done. Japan ready to sacrifice *Asuma.* Old cruiser, anyhow. You understand."

He paused, his slitted eyes studying the Filipino's face. Lopez lighted a cigarette and smoked reflectively.

"You want your own warship bombed by one of my people?"

"Yes, you understand. It is for their good. America has thrown you off. You need protector. Japan is the protector for all Asian peoples."

Lopez nodded slightly, but his narrow eyes were heavy-lidded, and he puffed even more slowly on his cigarette. He was weighing Watenabe's words and assaying their worth from his own point of view.

"And after your cruiser, *Asuma,* is bombed, what then?" he asked.

"Japanese fleet will arrive and take over," the count replied glibly. "Islands to be organized. Our Emperor will recognize friends, and Ernesto Lopez will be-

come Prince of Luzon. Japanese Empire will become Asian Empire, uniting all Asian peoples. Prince of Asian Empire will be big man."

Once more the Filipino turned to his cigarette. He must be careful, for he was pitted against one of the most treacherous rogues in the Far East. He knew Count Watenabe's past record. Although a private citizen, he had dangled empire before the eyes of Henry Pu Yi, only to make him a puppet king upon a toy throne. Even the wily Chan So Fu of Manchuria had been tricked by him.

Count Watenabe's thin face was lined by a mirthless smile. His eyes never left the masklike features of the Filipino.

"How about the American Navy and Corregidor?" Lopez asked.

"You said you had a statement from the admiral."

"I have, but I am keeping it, together with another record. The other record is very interesting. It speaks in a voice not unlike yours, *Señor* Count. It suggests that my people destroy a Japanese warship to give your emperor an excuse to seize these islands. It speaks of starting war to launch an Asian empire."

Watenabe's lids thinned to slits through which the black eyes glistened.

"And what does the voice resembling yours say?" he asked.

"It proclaims my love of country and my desire for peace," Lopez answered.

THE Japanese sipped his saki, then tapped his teeth with his ivory cigarette holder. His eyes never left the Filipino's. Two agile masters of treachery were fencing silently.

"Two very interesting records," the count finally murmured.

"Two very valuable records," Lopez corrected, "but of course I would not think of disposing of them until after I am Prince of Luzon. Meantime—" He paused.

"Our godlike Son of Sun would not fail to reward so clever a servant," Watenabe said. "But in meantime, as you say, business languishes. With *Asuma* bombed—"

"An expensive undertaking for one so poor," Lopez put in.

"I am prepared to meet any reasonable expense—for the glory of Nippon. Say one hundred thousand *yen*."

"With the *yen* at half price!" Lopez bargained. "I am sorry, *Señor* Count. A hundred thousand *pesos*—fifty thousand American dollars—and we can talk of further things, but *yen*—I am sorry."

A dull red stain came to the face of the Japanese, and he sucked in his breath. Finally he nodded his head and said, "All right. American notes will do."

Lopez filled the saki cups. "To the Asian Empire, *Señor* Count," he offered, "and the confusion of all whites."

"*Banzai!*" Watenabe gulped his drink. "And now to business. First, that American spy who poses as an admiral's aid—"

"You mean Christopher Morton?"

"I do not know his name."

"He will be no more bother. One of my aids has disposed of him. I saw the finale. For this, I am debiting you for five thousand more *pesos*. In fact—"

He paused as the door slid back and a frightened serving maid fell on her knees and began bowing like an agitated doll. Behind her stood a Filipino, his face streaked with perspiration. He had run through the burning heat to reach the tea house.

"What is it, Tomas?" Ernesto Lopez asked.

"Pablo—he was drowned," the man blurted. "His body has just been found."

"Did the others come up?"

"The others were saved. That spy—"

The man paused. A sliding window behind Lopez was opening slowly. A turbaned head appeared, and then a deeply lined face. A short length of bamboo pipe was raised.

"Senator, senator!" Tomas screamed, "*Tenga cuidado* take care! *El Moro*—"

Ernesto Lopez hurled himself across the room, rolling like a rubber ball. Count Nogi Watenabe stared at the sinister face in the window and dodged to one side.

Tomas jerked a pistol from beneath his white jacket and raised its lethal point.

At the same instant, there was a sound like a popping cork. Tomas dropped his weapon, his hands flying to his throat. An expression of horror came to his face. He pulled a small black thorn from his neck and stared at it, unbelievingly. His finger touched a drop of blood beside his pulsing jugular vein.

Ernesto Lopez and Count Watenabe stared with unbelieving eyes at the man standing in the middle of the room. His face was working convulsively. He spun around once, then fell, face foremost.

Lopez glanced at the window. It was closed, now. He got to his feet slowly, visibly shaken.

"Tomas dead—Pablo dead—and the spy still lives," he muttered.

Watenabe glared at him, his slitted eyes filled with disdain. Although he was not of the *samurai,* he scorned all weakness. But for the phonographic records in the Filipino's possession, he would have turned upon him then, but he smiled mirthlessly and poured fresh cups of *saki.*

"Courage, my friend," he murmured. "You shall be Prince of Luzon. *Banzai!* The dead are dead, but we still live."

Lopez snatched up the stone bottle in which the liquor was served. He raised it to his trembling lips and held it there until the last drop had coursed down his throat. Then he picked up the pistol Tomas had dropped.

"You are right, *Señor* Count," he said. "I shall still be Prince of Luzon. *Banzai* —the Asian Empire!"

A TORRID night followed the sun-baked day. In a breathless dawn, the flagship *California* weighed her hook and made ready to steam to Corregidor. where the fleet had assembled. An hour before her departure, a swarm of *sampans* gathered about the battleship. Boat merchants made a last desperate effort to sell souvenirs to officers and crew. Disregarding his former custom, Admiral Gray gave permission for traders to come aboard and spread their wares upon the broad forecastle.

A pearl-fishing schooner, fresh from the reefs of Borneo, came alongside, and ragged seamen offered gems they had bought or stolen in the south. Below, in the admiral's cabin, a final conference was held. Kit Morton appeared, but not as the aid who had accompanied the commander-in-chief ashore. Instead of a junior officer, he was a ragged and dirty seaman, just off a hell-ship.

The older man's blue eyes twinkled as he appraised Morton. Then his face sobered and he gestured him to a chair.

"You'd deceive almost anyone, but a Malay's eyes are sharp," the admiral warned him.

"I've got to wait a day or so for my beard to grow," Kit said. "Then I'll chance daylight. Night's easy. I'll go ashore as soon as we can find a berth."

Gray nodded, and turned to some notes upon his desk. "What do you think they're planning?" he asked.

"Something to do with the *Asuma.* Just what I don't know, but you saw—"

"Yes—just before that power-boat hit us." He referred to his notes once more. "You have your code memorized?"

"Yes, sir. Also the variant."

"That's good. Keep me informed. Your schooner is alongside, so you'd better shove off."

Kit Morton arose. His costume consisted of a tattered, sleeveless shirt, duck trousers that once had been white, and a battered mate's cap. His hair was matted and his face generously smeared. Ward-room mates would have had to look at him thrice before recognition.

Admiral Gray walked with him to the door. He opened it to disclose a Marine sentry standing stiffly at attention.

"If you have any more pearls at that price and can give good title, I'll be glad to examine them," the commander said, as they went forward.

"I'll save the best from the next voyage, sir," Morton answered, continuing the play.

He went over the side and took his place at the wheel of the pearl schooner. After a few raucous commands, the little vessel cast off and started across the harbor.

Kit watched the *California* heave anchor and glide down the bay. His great adventure was beginning. By morning, the fleet would be on its way to Hongkong, paying a formal call to the British admiral who had steamed north from Singapore.

Both British and Americans were on the *qui vive*. The atmosphere of the Far East had grown tense since the American Congress had voted for the freedom of the Philippines. Now that the islands were self-governing, Manila had become a hive of intrigue. The stand taken by the American government had made the Navy's position all but untenable. Washington had no authority, yet it retained responsibility. Filipino politicians could connive to their heart's desire, but America had underwritten the independence of the islands.

"And war must be avoided at every cost," were Admiral Gray's final instructions.

Morton waited until the *California* was no longer in sight. A light breeze rippled the water, and the schooner's jib and mainsail were hoisted. Kit turned the wheel over to a Malay sailor and lounged in a rattan deck chair. They were near the Japanese cruiser *Asuma*, but barely making headway.

He saw a power-boat leave the cruiser's side and foam through water toward the quay. It was the captain's gig, sent, undoubtedly, to bring a distinguished visitor. Kit Morton raised his marine glasses and leveled them on the wharf. A group of short, white-clad figures had gathered there. Several were Japanese naval officers. In their center was a little man with sunken eyes and a stiff, bristly moustache. The American focussed on his face.

Count Nogi Watenabe!

MORTON knew the man as the most dangerous figure in the Far East. As chief of one of the most active Nipponese patriotic societies, he had fomented trouble wherever he had gone. After taking a leading part in Manchuria, he had gone to America, there to stir the Oriental population of the Pacific States until civil war was threatened. He had plotted in Siam, and all but unthroned a king. His Machiavellian operations had two goals, the glory of Nippon and his own advancement. Once a merchant, he had shown the same restless force in politics and had fought and bought his way into the peerage.

The *Asuma's* gig came alongside the quay, and Kit saw Count Watenabe enter the compartment reserved for commanding officers. In another moment, the speedy craft was driving back toward the cruiser at top speed.

Kit watched the gig, but made no motion to change the schooner's course. His blue eyes were dreamy, and a puzzled expression came to his face.

"Looks like our old friend, skipper," a voice said.

The words were spoken by a thick-shouldered man, as ragged and dirty as Kit Morton. He, too, had made an ostentatious display of selling pearls when alongside the *California*, although he had not gone aboard. No one would have taken him for a young naval officer whose handsome face fluttered the hearts of Washington's sub-debs. On the shadowed stage of the Navy's Intelligence service, Ralph Dayton was Kit's chief aid. Others of the motley crew of the pearl schooner were in the same service. Some were Filipinos, members of the Moro or Visayan tribes, who hated the ruling Tegalogs and *mestizos* with age-old loathing.

"Yes, that's the count," Morton answered, "but we can't afford to give him a good look at us."

He threw the wheel over, and the schooner nosed toward the upper bay. *Sampans* crowded the waterfront. *Lorchas*, their picturesque sails furled, were tied to the docks. Kit Morton looked for a berth, but he took his time. He would wait until the descending sun lengthened the shadows and plunged swiftly toward its bed of purple clouds.

"What's to-night's program, skipper?" Dayton asked, as the day wore on.

Kit Morton rubbed his chin. He had

not shaved the day before, and the stubble was thickening. In the dank, humid atmosphere of the tropics, it itched confoundedly.

"We've got a lot to do, all of us." Kit referred to some notes the admiral had given him. "You and your crowd look after Watenabe. He'll be back this evening. I'm on the trail of the distinguished Luzon senator, Ernesto Lopez. And Nunez—he's a son of one of those head-hunters down Mindanao way, isn't he?"

"Yes, but the old man's reformed, he told me."

"That's good, but as a Moro, he can find out something that may be important. When the admiral and I came away from Lopez' house, I noticed an old beggar out in front. He wore his turban like a *datu*."

"I don't see what—"

"Neither do I. That's what makes it interesting. Tell Nunez to find out."

"Okay, skipper."

The sun sank swiftly, but night brought no relief to the sweltering city. Morton nosed the schooner into a berth far from the *Escolta* and gave his aids their final instructions. He dived into his cabin, put on a greasy pair of canvas shoes and a rumpled blouse to screen his sleeveless shirt, but didn't comb his hair or wash his face. Then he went ashore, threading his way through crowded streets now coming to life with the arrival of night.

He paused at the first *cantina*. Operated by a Chinese *mestizo*, it catered to sailors freshly ashore. Fishermen, crews from inter-island schooners and small steamers, lined the bar. In the rear, an automatic piano was playing, tinnily. Men danced with native girls, whose yellow-brown faces were covered with rice powder until they were ghostly white. Tiny dolls with quaint puff-sleeve dresses, they waltzed with a dignity entirely out of keeping with their bizarre surroundings.

"*Cerveza*—beer," Morton ordered.

He sipped from his foaming glass, his eyes on the cloudy mirror behind the bar. He saw a face as illy kept as his own peer over his shoulders. Their eyes met in the glass, and Kit blinked.

"Any news, Arturo?" he asked softly.

"Lopez has some phonograph records that ought to be hot stuff," the man whispered.

"The admiral's?" Morton asked.

"No—something Watenabe said."

"Then I must get them."

"Better watch out, skipper. Some one on the ship tipped Lopez off that you're ashore, and he's got his *kris* men out looking for you. They'll comb this town."

"Then the safest place will be his house on the Playa. They won't look there," said Kit Morton. "I'll write out directions for you and Ralph Dayton. Get in touch with him. He's on Watenabe's trail."

CHAPTER III

Murder Knives

NETS within nets were seining Manila, seeking to catch fish large and small in the amazing plots and counterplots that followed the Islands' first steps in independence. The Tegalog politicians, under Ernesto Lopez, had their spies and informers in every section. The word had been passed that Kit Morton and his aids must be apprehended and slain. Until their lifeless bodies were dumped in Passig, there could be neither safety nor profit.

Kit and his crew were active and well organized. They moved with swift precision, but each man knew his life would end with recognition by either Filipinos or Japanese.

Count Watenabe, too, was directing a corps of operatives, both native and fellow countrymen. His honeyed words with Lopez only faintly disguised his hatred and suspicion. As long as Lopez retained the phonographic records of his suggestion that Filipinos destroy the cruiser *Asuma*, Watenabe was in peril. His own country would disown him. Success alone could atone for the dark trickery he had launched with the island politician.

Other shadowy figures were hovering

about both Lopez and the count. The dank air was made heavier by intrigue, the heat more oppressive. Murder lurked in every shadow. Small thin blades, whose tips were black with poison, itched to cool themselves on the blood of men whose hands gripped similar weapons.

Kit Morton finished his glass of beer without turning his head. A glance into the mirror told him that Arturo had mingled in the crowd of dancers in the rear of the *cantina*. Wiping his lips on a dirty towel hanging from the bar rail, the American turned and strolled into the teeming street. He dodged a lumbering *carabao* who was dragging a cart filled with cocoanut hulls, and signaled to the *cochero* of a rickety victoria. Soon the ragged equipage was rolling toward the Escolta.

Kit lay back upon the frayed cushions, puffing a long, black cigarette. He had every appearance of the sailor ashore, spending the few dollars he had earned during months at sea. Manila was used to such sights. They had been common since Magellan first sailed up the bay and gave shore liberty to men who had crossed the Pacific for the first time.

Reaching the Escolta, Kit alighted at one of the more prosperous American bars, operated by Laurence McCarthy, a friend of Admiral Gray's. Once reserved for Aryan trade, it was now a favorite rendezvous for native officials of both Spanish and *mestizo* strain. Politics was the sole topic of conversation.

Morton did not pause long. He strode to the far end of the bar and ordered beer once more. While the glass was held to his lips, his eyes made a rapid survey of the room. Halfway between him and the door he caught a glimpse of Ernesto Lopez, talking to a circle of cronies. Occasionally the senator's voice boomed out, as though he were addressing an assemblage.

"Liberty is ours," Kit heard him bellow, "but it must be jealously guarded. We forced the Yankee to strike off our shackles, but new chains are being forged. Better death than slavery!"

Morton smiled into his glass. There was no reason for him to stay and listen. Lopez would utter only political platitudes for hours to come. Kit's visit, at least, had told him that the senator was absent from his home.

Pulling his cap down over his eyes, Morton went toward the door. Although he had had but two glasses of beer, Morton affected a slight stagger as he signaled a cruising taxicab that rattled up to the curb, its engine wheezing asthmatically.

"Playa—want to see the Playa," Kit mumbled, as he climbed in.

The driver nodded. It was a short run to the other side of the walled city, but the chauffeur took a tortuous route. Morton dozed in the back seat, paying small attention to the district through which he was passing. The cab glided around a corner and he stiffened in his seat.

"Stop," he croaked. "Stop—*estoy infermo*—I'm sick."

He tumbled from the cab and staggered into the velvet shade of a cluster of nut palms. Then he lurched back to toss a five-*peso* bank note to his driver

"*Vaya*—go on," he ordered. "I want to take a walk."

The chauffeur chuckled. The cab rattled on its way back to the Escolta, in search of other drunken sailormen.

Kit Morton straightened and walked hurriedly down the palm-lined avenue. Ahead he glimpsed a couple coming in his direction, and his slight stagger returned. The couple passed and Kit continued. As he neared a white house, well back from the street, he slowed his pace. Squatting beneath a palm on the edge of the curb was a ragged beggar. A silvery moonbeam had stolen through the fronds to fall upon his turban. It was wound in the manner used by the head-hunters of Mindanao.

KIT veered from the walk and dodged into the deeper shadow of a hibiscus hedge. The presence of the turbaned Moro was a surprise. He circled back of the house and edged up toward the

servants' quarters. As he glanced through the window, he saw the greater part of the staff gathered about a table, a rice bowl in the center.

He looked at his wrist-watch. It lacked a few minutes of ten o'clock. Kit slid back into the hibiscus hedge and squatted down. The perspiration trickled down his face and gathered on his stubble-covered chin. Nervous tension gripped him. He had written out a hurried plan for Arturo to give to Ralph Dayton, and much depended upon what happened within the next fifteen minutes. During his visit to the Lopez home with Admiral Gray, he had made observations that would speed his work. If Ralph and Arturo only did their share, the operation should be a success.

The minutes were dragging slowly. Not a leaf stirred in the hibiscus hedge. It was hotter there than in the open. The palm fronds hung listlessly. Even the wide-leafed plantains were motionless. The earth, itself, seemed to be perspiring.

His eye was held upon the radium-illuminated face of his watch. The minute hand was approaching the hour. He waited almost breathlessly. Then he heard the sounds of a motor coming down the street. He stiffened, crouching like a runner waiting to hear the starter's gun. Then a crash sounded through the stillness. There was a yell, and the shouts of many voices. A touring car and a truck had collided in the street, half a block from the Lopez home.

The crash brought a dozen faces to the windows of the servants' quarters. The yells sent the Lopez staff scurrying to the scene of the accident. Nothing so attracts a Filipino as a motor collision. Morton watched until he was certain not a servant remained in the house. Then he dashed across the shell-covered driveway and entered the rear door.

The front of the house was dark. Not a light burned on the second floor. Entering the library in which he and Admiral Gray had talked with Ernesto Lopez, he snapped on a small pocket torch. First he examined the wiring beneath the table. Lopez had not even removed the microphone. Then Kit began tracing the wires. They led to a room on the second floor.

Something approaching a riot was in progress outside. Ralph and Arturo were following instructions. They must keep the Lopez servants thoroughly interested for fifteen minutes, at least. As he peered out the window, Kit saw a small, slender figure running around the house, but he gave it small heed. He went up the stairs, two steps at a time.

The room above the library proved to be a private office. Lopez received his guests below, but his work was done at the long teakwood table in the center of a book-lined apartment. Morton surveyed the room hastily. His attention focussed on a metal filing cabinet. He opened one of the drawers, but it contained only letters and papers. A second, too, was devoted to political correspondence. A third slid back on its ball-bearing rollers.

Morton's nerves went taut when he saw a dozen wax dictaphone records resting in sockets of cotton wool. He slipped one out and glanced around the room. Near the window was a small desk with a dictaphone reproducing machine. Doubtless Lopez' secretary worked there. Kit fitted on the record and started the machine. He clamped the tubes to his ears and listened. The first voice was that of Lopez. Then he recognized Admiral Gray's measured tones.

A shadow of disappointment crossed his face. He stopped the motor and tried another record. It was not the one he sought. A third, then a fourth he tried—but the fifth sent his blood tingling to his temples.

"Our plan—it very simple. If cruiser *Asuma* is hurt by bomb, Japanese honor demands occupation," came the words of Count Watenabe. "For this we pay ver' handsomely, and—"

Although every sense was focussed on the dictaphone, an inner bell seemed to toll a warning, and Kit glanced around. He saw a dark object catapulting across the room. A ray of moonlight

was reflected upon a small *kris*, whose wavelike blade was tipped with black.

Morton had no time to draw a weapon. He snatched the ear tubes from his head. In another moment he was struggling with a little man, scarcely half his size, who fought with the desperation of a Malay gone amok. Hardly had they locked in combat when a second figure appeared and joined the first.

KIT MORTON realized within a few seconds that he was battling with a master jujitsu wrestler. He had no time to struggle with him. The man was already looking for an opening to use his *kris*. The American doubled his fist and shot in a blow that made his foe shudder. With another, the man went limp in Morton's arms. Wresting a dagger from the Japanese's feeble fingers, he turned on his second adversary, and the jujitsu wrestler slumped to the floor.

Two huge men faced each other. Each held a *kris*. Both blades were probably poisoned, and a scratch would bring quick death. The room was dark. A few random moonbeams stole through the curtains, but the men kept in the shadow. They circled the limp figure of the Japanese. For a moment, Kit feared his adversary would throw his *kris*, Malay fashion. Then he realized the man was as ignorant of knives as himself.

He tried to get a glimpse of his foe's face, but the dim light of the room gave no hint of nationality. He dared not speak. He might reveal himself, and the sound of voices might attract attention. The fight in the street could not last much longer. Kit must win a quick victory and escape with the dictaphone records before the Lopez servants returned.

The two men continued to circle. Both were crouching, ready to spring at sight of the first opening. Morton increased his step, as though to close the distance between them. Then he wheeled and leaped. The ruse caught his foe by surprise. Morton had no desire to kill the man. It might lead to complications if he was captured. The recently launched Philippine government would make much ado about an American Naval Intelligence officer arrested for a murder in the home of one of its senators.

Grasping his adversary's wrist, Kit gave it a twist that brought a pain-filled curse. The *kris* tinkled as it struck a piece of furniture and then slithered to the floor. For a moment they rocked back and forth. Morton's adversary was making desperate efforts to break away. He had lost his *kris*, and he realized that the American still possessed a weapon.

"No, you don't," Kit growled, as the man tried to grasp his throat.

Then he felt something clutch his ankle. The Japanese with whom he had first fought was regaining consciousness. Kit kicked at the man on the floor, but missed. The effort threw him off balance, and he and the big man staggered, then fell.

"*Escucha*—listen—" Morton began in Spanish.

His words ended. His adversary had gripped his throat. He felt a nerve-paralyzing grip upon his right wrist, and his *kris* fell into the darkness. Both the Japanese and the big man were attacking him. Somewhere on the floor of that darkened room were two poisoned blades. A scratch from either would be fatal. Meantime, he must fight two men, each bent on killing him.

He redoubled his efforts, striking out at one, then another. The battle turned into a mêlée of flailing arms and kicking legs. Then Kit caught a glimpse of a new figure in the room, a ghostly phantom that dashed across the rugs, avoiding the bitterly struggling men, paused for a moment and then dashed out again.

He could not tell what type of man had come and gone. He was only a wraithlike being that flitted like a shadow across a beam of moonlight and then passed on again.

KIT increased the strength of his efforts He felt the square chin of his larger adversary press against his shoulder, and he doubled his fist and threw a full-powered hook that landed

on the point of the jaw. The big man fell away. Kit turned on the Japanese in time to see him snatch up the *kris*. There was a flash of light as the weapon slashed at him. Morton dodged. Then a groan told him that the poisoned blade had struck his adversary of a moment before.

There was another flash. The *kris* was raised aloft. Morton kicked out, and his foot struck something soft. A crash sounded as the little Japanese was hurled against the heavy legs of the table in the center of the room. Then there was silence.

Kit leaped to his feet and reached out to the small stand upon which the dictaphone stood. His electric torch was there. He pressed its button. The white beam showed his larger adversary, a gigantic Chinese, writhing on the floor. Huddled against the table leg was the Japanese, limp, if not lifeless.

Morton spun around. He had no time to waste. He could hear voices below. The servants had returned. The riot in the street had ended. The bright beam of the flashlight played upon the dictaphone. Both the records were missing.

Morton started for the door. As he reached the head of the stairs, he saw one of the Filipino servants coming up. Lights were flashing on below. As he dodged into a shadow, he caught a glimpse of another figure hiding behind a curtain. The Filipino house boy came up the stairs, three steps at a time. He paused on the landing, looking around.

There was a sound like the popping of a cork, and the man staggered. His hand went to his throat, as though murderous fingers were strangling him. Kit looked back to the curtain. A small bamboo pipe was being lowered. It was the blow pipe of a Moro poison dart thrower. The man would insert another deadly missile and then—Kit's own quick death.

Froth dripped from the lips of the Filipino house boy. A hoarse cry bubbled out, an inhuman sound like the ululation of some wild animal, wounded unto death.

Kit Morton hurled himself down the stairs. As he sprang, he heard the staccato report of the Malay blow pipe, and another deadly dart sped through the air. It whizzed by his head and struck the wall.

A blur of faces appeared at the foot of the stairs, but Morton crashed into them. His fists and feet lashed out, and men melted away. The front door was half-open, and he burst through it. On the street, he dodged into the deep shadows of the palms and walked rapidly to where a motor car was standing, its engine still running. He stepped inside, and the machine glided from the curb.

"Good work, Dayton! You were on time to the second," Kit told his aid.

"Did you get what you were looking for?"

"No. We've got to step on it. I've found out what's coming off. Drive down to the Nippon Club. I understand that the officers of the *Asuma* are guests there to-night."

Ralph Dayton glanced at his chief with puzzled eyes. "Working with the Japs?" he asked.

"Yes—this time. The admiral's orders were to keep out of war."

DISAPPOINTMENT awaited Kit Morton, however, when he reached the ornate building used as a clubhouse by the wealthy Japanese of Manila. Captain Nikijima, commander of the *Asuma*, send word through a servant that he was unable to see the American gentleman who had called.

Kit looked up at a window over the main entrance, to see several faces peering down. Among them was Count Watenabe's. Morton pulled his cap over his eyes, screening his face, but Ralph Dayton stared up defiantly.

"Don't let him get a good look at you," Morton warned.

He signaled to their chauffeur, and the car rolled away, stopping when they reached the Escolta. Midnight had come, and Manila was taking life after the intense heat of the day. But even then the hot, dank night was enervating. Kit Morton had much to do. There

was no time to rest. He had found a dictaphone record which partially revealed the plot between Lopez and Count Watenabe, but he had lost it again. It was the sole evidence of conspiracy, and it had been stolen during his battle on the floor.

"Who do you think got it?" Ralph Dayton asked, when they were afoot again.

"If I knew, it would make things a lot simpler. Too many persons are interested in getting it. Watenabe heads the list, but I think I knocked out his man. Then there's the opposition in the Philippine congress. They're rugged boys, these representatives and senators. They get their information by murder, instead of investigation. Then there's—"

He paused and glanced back over his shoulder. They had reached a section of the Escolta which had few pedestrians. He caught a glimpse of a shadowy figure dodging from one doorway to another. On the other side of the street, two sprucely dressed natives were strolling, their eyes fixed on the American. A *careta*, filled with Japanese dressed in cool pongees and Panamas, was driving slowly down the street, keeping pace with their steps.

"Shadows?" Dayton asked, without turning his head.

"Three sets," Kit answered from the side of his mouth, "and every one out to murder us."

"What a pleasant evening!"

Morton grinned. He had believed the immediate danger was over when he short length of bamboo pipe appear over Now he knew that unless he and Ralph Dayton freed themselves of these clinging shadows, one or both of them would be dead before the sun again began to hurl its blistering rays upon Manila.

They were walking in a maze of espionage and counter-espionage. The intricacies of Philippine politics only added to their troubles. Kit Morton knew that Lopez controlled the government operatives, and no appeal for aid could be made to them, although the liberty of the islands was at stake. Spies of the opposition might help, but he had no time in which to hunt them out. He and Ralph were in momentary danger. If any of those clinging shadows was armed with a bamboo blow pipe, the end might come at any second.

Morton increased his stride. He glanced at his wrist-watch. He had made arrangements to meet Nunez at one o'clock to hear his report on the Moro activities against Lopez and the government in power. He must not miss that appointment—yet to meet Nunez with a cloud of spies in his wake would only add to their danger.

They were entering the more brilliantly lighted section of the Escolta. The crowds were thickening, and the trailing shadows moved up closer, fearing to lose him in the press.

A stab of red in the glare ahead was Morton's goal. A neon light flashed out with the words, "American Bar." It would be filled with Filipino politicians. Ernesto Lopez would be there, unless called home by his frightened servants, yet the place offered sanctuary. Laurence McCarthy was one of the few Americans who had withstood the inroads of the native and *mestizo* competitors. White-haired now, he had once been a soldier, and had settled in Manila when his term of service had expired.

DODGING through the thickening throngs, Kit Morton and Ralph Dayton slipped through the swinging doors. The blare of McCarthy's negro orchestra came from the back of the establishment. There had been no music earlier in the evening. The American Bar did not reach full bloom until after midnight.

Kit Morton glanced over his shoulder. He saw yellow, slant-eyed faces peering over the swinging door. The spies had stopped at the threshold. Some would remain outside on guard, while others would enter. As he looked, he saw a short length of bamboo pipe appear over the door. It was lowered until it pointed toward Morton. In another second, a deadly dart would whiz through the air, bearing the sting of death.

Kit grasped Ralph by the arm and dodged into Laurence McCarthy's private office. A ponderous man with thick snowy hair and purpling cheeks stared up at them. Before him were piles of banknotes and silver coins. He was counting the day's receipts.

"What are you bums doing here?" he demanded. His hand snapped out of the drawer at his right and came up with a revolver. "Hands up and back against the door, or I'll blow your heads off," he growled. "No stick-up can get away with anything here."

Kit Morton raised his hands and grinned broadly. Ralph Dayton followed his example.

"What's the joke?" McCarthy demanded. "Gimme me a laugh and I'll buy a drink."

Kit's face sobered. He knew Laurence McCarthy possessed more secrets of Filipino intrigue than any foreigner in Manila. He was thoroughly American and could be trusted.

"We came in here to keep from being killed. Lopez and his gang are after us. So is Watenabe," Morton told him.

The names made McCarthy's eyes narrow. He studied the two disheveled men before him.

"And why would those two want to knock off the likes of you?" he demanded.

Kit Morton groped in his mind for some incident that would identify him and still leave explanations unspoken. He had been in the place several days before with Admiral Gray, and the commander had objected to the use of limes in his old-fashioned cocktail. He had complained to Laurence McCarthy is no uncertain language.

"I said—why should they want to knock off the likes of you?" the big man repeated.

"For the same reason Admiral Gray doesn't like limes in his drink," Kit Morton retorted.

McCarthy lowered his pistol and sank back in his chair. His keen blue eyes looked up from beneath shaggy brows, studying the young man's face, feature by feature.

"I never would have recognized you," he muttered. "Mebbe you're stringing me. What did you have?"

"A very good sloe gin rickey."

McCarthy nodded soberly and put his revolver in the drawer. "All right, sir." He addressed Kit as he would an officer. "What can I do?"

"Help us get out of here alive."

"I've got a strong arm gang that—"

"No, that won't do. You have a negro orchestra. Call them below stairs and lend me two of their uniforms. Keep them there for fifteen minutes—that's all I ask."

"But you're white and they're—"

"A little burnt cork will fix that," Kit broke in.

McCARTHY waited until the orchestra had finished a blaring rhumba, then summoned the musicians below stairs, ordering them to change into fresh uniforms. Kit and Ralph Dayton remained in the background, busily rubbing burnt cork on their faces, necks and arms. Soon they climbed into the uniforms McCarthy tossed through the door.

"How about our hair?" Dayton asked.

"Pull your cap down low."

"Okay, skipper. Let's go."

They avoided the bright interior of the café and slid out into the street from a side door. Kit brushed against a slender Oriental, whose slitty eyes studied him as he came out. The man's hand was resting on the hilt of a small *kris*. He glanced at Morton's blackened face, then at Dayton's. It was fortunate that the light was dim for the piercing eyes, peering through the gloom, took in every detail of their costumes.

"Come on, big boy, let's us all git a little ol' shot of gin," Kit bubbled, as they emerged. "Only serve white an' yallar folks in dat place."

At the corner, a knot of dapper Japanese loitered, but their sharp eyes gauged each passing face. Squatting in the gutter was a withered Moro, his turban twisted in the manner of a *datu* from the head-hunting tribes, far to the south.

"They certainly were on our trails tonight," Ralph Dayton said, when they reached a dark side street.

Kit Morton looked at his wrist-watch. "We've barely got time to meet Nunez," he said. "He's working on the Moro end of this show. He ought to have some hot news."

"Where do you meet him?"

"Down by the Caliph's Mosque, that betel nut shop run by the ex-rajah of Bellingor."

But when they reached the little establishment, they found new tragedy, new mystery. A crowd had collected, and small native policemen were elbowing their way through a press of wildly excited Moros. Mohommedan curses filled the air, and the diminutive police shrank from stirring these wild tribesman.

"Say, buddy, what's the row?" Kit Morton had wiped the black from his face. Now it was merely dirty.

"Moro murder," replied the patrolman. "Ver' bad mans—Moros. Kill aw' the time."

"Yeah? Well, let's see how they do it," the American bellowed.

Kit Morton felt a sickening feeling as he plowed through the sweating, moiling crowd. At last he reached the betel shop, where a circle of turbaned Moros stood staring down at the face of a dead man. Ralph Dayton gripped Kit's arm as he joined him. The dead man was Dajo Nunez, who had been detailed to work out one phase of the intrigue in which the Navy Intelligence corps was involved.

"They got him all right," Dayton muttered.

"And that isn't all."

Kit pointed to some black fragments beside the dead man. They were pieces of a dictaphone record.

CHAPTER IV

"Piracy Brings Death!"

THE tropic's blazing dawn was near when Kit Morton finished encoding his wireless message to Admiral Gray. He had much to tell, yet much more remained to be discovered. He had not penetrated far beneath the surface of the amazing intrigue going on in the Philippine capital, but he had at least uncovered the menace that lowered over the peace of the Far East. Destruction of a Japanese warship in Manila harbor could have only one result — a war in which America would have to protect the independence of the islands or lose face for all time.

Kit had taken the first and most obvious step when he attempted to warn Captain Nikijima, commander of the *Asuma*. But Nikijima had been obdurate, and Watenabe had sent his assassins on Morton's trail. There was no doubt of that. Certain, too, was the fact that other head-hunters had mingled with the shadows that followed the two Americans. Whom did they represent?

"Nunez might have told us," Morton said.

"Yes, and he might have said where he got that piece of dictaphone record," replied Dayton.

Kit nodded. The swift sunrise of the tropics was flooding the bay with golden light. Morton raised his marine glasses and trained them on the Japanese cruiser *Asuma*. Lines of freshly scrubbed clothes were being raised from the forecastle. Although the officers had played all night at the Nippon Club, the crew had gone to work at dawn.

Sampans already were clustering around the warship. Kit trained his glasses upon them. Then he caught a glimpse of the captain's gig nosing up to the landing stage. A tight smile came to the young man's lips and he took a sheet of paper from the rattan table that stood beside his deck chair. Captain Nikijima had refused to receive him, but Kit would see that a warning reached the little skipper.

"Is that short wave set of ours working?" he asked Ralph.

"It was, yesterday."

"Swell! We'll just send this little *billet-doux* to Nikijima San."

He handed the paper upon which he

had been writing to Dayton. A grin crossed the man's face, as he read:

"Plot to destroy *Asuma* uncovered. If interested in details, fly checkered ensign from main halyards."

"That ought to smoke him out," Dayton muttered.

He slid down the companionway to the schooner's cabin and, a moment later, Morton heard the faint click of the key of the sending set. He waited a few minutes and then trained his glasses on the *Asuma*.

Scarcely had the last of the message been snapped into the ether when Kit saw a white-uniformed messenger leave the superstructure and dash down the iron steps leading to the lower decks. In his hand was a paper, the message which had flown through space.

"They got it," Ralph Dayton called from below. "They gave me their I-I."

"Hook up your receiving set and listen in. Copy everything."

"Aye, aye, sir."

MORTON remained in his deck chair, his eyes upon the *Asuma*. Then a warning tolled in his mind, and he called to the native engineer to start the schooner's kicker. The rhythmic beat of the engine sounded as a ball climbed the main halyards of the Japanese warship. A moment later, it burst into a checkered ensign. Captain Nikijima had received the message and was asking for details.

Kit's smile widened. He called down the companionway to where Ralph Dayton was listening in.

"Get anything?" he asked.

"Yes. A message in Kana code to Watenabe."

"I thought so. We've got to step on it."

"All right, sir? What's the program?" Ralph's head came through the hatchway.

"Take your sending set and get in that automobile we had last night. Keep sending and keep traveling. Give the *Asuma* all the details we know. Repeat if you run out of words, but circle the bay, if you have to. I'll stick around for Watenabe San. See you at Arturo's."

Dayton's eyes puckered as a grin lighted his face. He dodged below again and soon reappeared, the short wave set packed in a suitcase.

The schooner's motor was still running at low speed, but the propeller was motionless. Kit waited for several minutes after Ralph had left. It would take him some little time to reach their automobile. He glanced at his watch, then went below for a telescope with twice the power of his marine glasses. He trained it on the officers' landing stage of the cruiser *Asuma*.

The sober light left his blue eyes when he saw the dapper figure of Captain Nikijima come down the steps and clamber into his gig. Soon it was foaming toward the quay where the naval tenders landed. The next boats to leave the cruiser made Kit focus his high-powered lenses with more than usual care. Officers stood in the stern sheets, operating instruments that looked not unlike artillery range finders. They were direction compasses, and the Japanese were taking no chance on error. The boats spread out, forming a base line a mile in length. Any stationary set would be picked up and located within a few minutes by these precise instruments.

Morton watched the boats maneuver, and his smile widened. Ralph Dayton had followed instructions, and was sending from an automobile whose position changed constantly. The Japanese were thoroughly confused. Then Kit took his second step. He changed his uniform to an even dirtier set of ducks, and prepared to go ashore.

"Somebody come by and by," he told the Pago-Pago bosun, who posed as skipper when the occasion demanded. "Treat velly polite. Tell 'em nothing. Let 'em come look-see."

"No savvy, nothing to tell," the man said in reply.

Kit nodded and went ashore. Only natives remained upon the schooner, but the American did not go farther than

the little *cantina* where he had met Arturo the night before. There he stopped and ordered the inevitable glass of beer, staring in the mirror until a familiar face looked over his shoulder.

"You watch this street. I'll cover the other. Look out for Moros with blow pipes, and Japs or *mestizos* with silenced automatics," he whispered. "Anything might happen."

"Things getting hot?"

"Yes, but before—"

He paused as they heard an automobile coming squawking down the narrow street. Shrill curses drove the grunting *carabaos* from the motor's path. Chinese coolies, shuffling along with burdens suspended upon long bamboo poles, swore colorful Cantonese oaths and crowded against the edge of the buildings.

Kit Morton looked out. The car was filled with Japanese, and seated next to the driver was Count Watenabe. The American stared. For, riding behind the automobile was a ragged Moro beggar on a bicycle. About his head was wrapped a turban in the manner of one of the petty chiefs of the head-hunting tribes, far to the south.

"I'd never expect to see him in Manila," Morton heard Arturo mutter.

"Who?"

"Datu Dak. He was once the Sultan of Jolo."

SLIDING out into the street and mingling with the crowd attracted by the coming of the automobile, Kit Morton watched Watenabe distribute his forces along the waterfront. One man remained in the automobile, and the American heard him chattering, as though talking to himself. Then Kit saw the radio antennæ stretched over the top of the automobile. Watenabe was working with the cruiser *Asuma*. The direction finders were communicating with the count, giving him instructions. They had picked up the position of the schooner. Soon they would be flashing corrections.

Morton had not included a radio-equipped automobile in his calculations. He had moved to lure the count down to the waterfront with one or two companions. Watenabe had come with half a dozen, each man armed.

Kit clambered up on the spare tire rack and quickly disconnected the radio lead wire. The chattering inside the automobile ceased. Then he hurried in the wake of Watenabe. Although his aids were spreading in either direction, the count was making for the pearl schooner. The little man's pace increased when he sighted the craft. Morton stepped into a *sampan*.

"Row slowly where I tell you," he whispered, dropping a *peso* note upon the deck.

The boatman nodded and took up his long sculling oar. Squatting in the matted deck house, Kit watched the Japanese stretch his short legs as he hurried down the deck. He paused at the gangplank, waiting for two of his aids to catch up with him, then boldly went aboard.

"Ease up alongside," Morton told his *sampan* man.

At a twist of the long sculling sweep, the little boat glided toward the schooner. Kit lay in the shadow of the *nipa* cabin, listening to Count Watenabe questioning his Pago-Pago bosun. He had given the man few instructions, but the Samoan had been long enough in Kit's service to understand his duties. He proudly proclaimed himself master of the pearl fisher and defied the Japanese to find anything wrong with either boat, cargo or papers.

"Look-see." The man gestured to the companionway leading into the schooner's cabin.

Watenabe hesitated. Kit gestured the *sampan* boatman to draw closer. The two boats were touching bumpers when the Japanese count motioned his two armed aids to precede him down the companionway. Then he drew his own pistol and followed.

Kit leaped lightly aboard the schooner. His plan was working out. With Ralph Dayton's radio flashing first from one section of the city, then another, the

Japanese would be swarming over Manila like a colony of ants. Meantime, he would have a long, quiet chat with his Lordship of Watenabe.

The count and his aids were below. Morton gave a signal to the Pago-Pago bosun, and they lowered the hatch covering the companionway. Then Kit grasped the tiller and signaled full speed astern. Cries sounded from below, but he gave no heed. The schooner was gliding out into the bay.

Facing the stern, the American did not see the ragged Moro beggar leave his bicycle on the dock and race to the pier end. With a leap, the man reached the forecastle, unobserved by either Kit or any member of his crew. The yells below increased in volume. Shots sounded and bullets crashed through the hatch cover, but Morton signed to his men to keep out of range. It was wasted ammunition.

The schooner was now in the stream, pointing its nose toward Cavite. The bosun came aft to take over the wheel, and Kit raised his field glasses to study the small boats of the cruiser *Asuma*. The craft bearing radio direction-finding apparatus had changed its base line from north and south to east and west. Ralph Dayton must have reached the other side of Manila.

The bright lights of the city dimmed as the schooner glided across the bay. Kit slouched in his chair. He was tired, but his mind continued to work at top speed. He had kidnaped a Japanese nobleman. The act, itself, might lead to war, but he realized that unless he struck audaciously, Ernesto Lopez and the count would force the issue. He must work with both speed and daring to avoid castastrophe.

The shouts from below were less loud, now that the schooner was under way. No more shots came through the hatch covering. Kit waited until they rounded a point which blotted the city from sight. Then he called through one of the bullet holes.

"Ahoy down there!"

"You hang for this," rasped the outraged voice of the Count Watenabe. "Piracy brings death. You hang."

"Suppose I hang you first?" Kit suggested.

The Japanese did not answer, and Morton undid the clamps that held the hatch covering.

"If you'll pass up your weapons, I'll let a little air down there," he said.

"Suppose I refuse?" Watenabe grated.

"Then I'll turn the engine exhaust into the cabin, and you'll quiet down quickly enough."

KIT heard a chattering in Japanese. Then three revolvers were shoved through the small opening in the hatch.

"Knives, too," Kit instructed.

After another conference, several *krises* were tossed out to fall on the deck. Then the hatch cover was lifted.

"If you'll come up, count," Morton called, "you'll find it much cooler here, and I can offer you a little beer that has been iced. I shall ask your men to remain below, however."

More words were spoken in Japanese. Then Count Watenabe scrambled up the companionway, his sloe eyes blazing. Kit Morton gestured him to a chair, took a bottle of beer from a small ice box that stood back of the binnacle and filled two glasses.

Perspiration was coursing down the count's face. It had been suffocating in the cabin. Even the heat of the canopied deck was cool by comparison. Kit threw himself into a chair and took up his glass.

"To our mutual friend, the senator," he toasted.

The flush on Watenabe's cheek turned to purple. "You work for him?" he rasped.

Kit nodded. Inwardly he smiled. He had wondered if Watenabe would suspect him, but the suspicions of the Japanese were concentrated more on his partner in intrigue than on the Americans.

"What he want?" the count demanded.

Morton glanced at the slitted eyes of the Oriental. They glistened like a ser-

pent's. Watenabe was already planning revenge. He would kill Ernesto Lopez, if he got the chance.

"He has what he wants," Kit said calmly.

The words only added to the other's outrage. He had paid Lopez and now . . .

"So that is it? I pay him and he hire beachcomber like you to take me away and kill me."

Once more Kit Morton nodded. The beady eyes of the Japanese flicked upward, studying the American's face. The count was no *samurai,* nor was he a coward. He was a graduate of the Japanese merchant class, a clan of traders whose guile is proverbial. He sought to negotiate, to trade with Morton, and still achieve the purpose of his plotting. Watenabe was a born gambler.

"You lose money, killing me," the count put out as his first feeler.

Kit's facial muscles were motionless. He knew he was fencing with one of the most guileful men in the Far East. He assumed a look of interest when the count's eyes met his.

"Perhaps," he admitted, "but you'll have to prove it."

The flush receded from Watenabe's cheek. Once more it was the color of old ivory. He sipped the beer he had neglected, his heavy-lidded eyes downcast. He was playing the greatest game in the world, the game of empire where men's lives were of small value and people were traded like herds of cattle.

"Malay all crooks," the count began. "You know I pay Lopez big money."

"Yeah. He took it and then radioed Captain Nikijima," Kit lied. "Sure, I know. He sent the message from near our berth—and you came down. Slick fellow, the senator."

"Pirate!" sputtered Watenabe. "But listen. I still got money, plenty money. I pay you."

"Yeah? For what?"

"You do work Lopez promise to do. That all right. Captain Nikijima, he know—everything."

Kit nodded sagely. Then he stiffened in his chair. Things were coming too easily. The plan was working without opposition. Watenabe was too easily deceived. Suspicion plucked at Morton's sleeve. He glanced up to see the count sipping his beer, his beady eyes looking over the rim of his glass. To Kit came the sensation that he was playing with a creature whose inner thoughts he could not understand. He had trapped this man and yet, perhaps, he was being tricked himself. He glanced at the open hatchway, leading down into the cabin. He saw the edge of a white yachting cap, rising slowly.

"Say, you—" he shouted, half-rising.

His words ended and his sight was blotted out. Watenabe had hurled half a glass of beer into his eyes and was now grappling with him.

Yells filled the air, and the rush of feet. He heard demands for a knife, a pistol, a belaying pin, in Japanese, English and Spanish. There was a cry of pain. Then Kit twisted from Watenabe's jujitsu hold. He staggered backward, striking blindly. He hit something soft, and heard a groan. Then he felt himself falling—and the warm waters of Manila Bay closed over him.

CHAPTER V

The Blood Brotherhood

A SHOT splashed near as Kit Morton came to the surface. Then came another. He looked toward the schooner to see Count Watenabe firing at him. The two Japanese, who had been below decks, were fighting the bosun and the Cebu engineer, who completed the schooner's crew. The bosun was reeling, although he still held the wheel. Then one of the Japanese stabbed him from behind, and he sank to the deck.

Another shot rang out, and Kit dived. Instead of turning away from the schooner, he swam toward it, taking an angle below the surface. He came up for air, but no more shots cut the water around him. Watenabe evidently believed he had been wounded or killed. But as soon as he had filled his lungs, he dived again. The schooner was near,

and he swam to where he might get hold of the rudder post, yet avoid the spinning propeller.

He came up almost beneath the overhanging stern, and struck out with long overhand strokes. He was about to grasp the rudder post when a hand touched his shoulder. He turned to look into a dripping face seamed with a thousand wrinkles. Atop a bullet-shaped head was a turban, tied like that of a head-hunting chief.

"Datu Dak!" Kit exclaimed breathlessly.

"You know me?" Even greater surprise showed in the Moro's dark eyes.

Morton nodded. For a moment he wondered what the old head-hunter would do. He must have been on the schooner. If he was an enemy, he would be there still. Then he must be a friend. What was Datu Dak doing there?

"Let's capture the boat again." Kit suggested in Spanish. They were swimming side by side.

"No use. Lose if win." The withered native shook his head. "'Nother boat come right soon."

He nodded toward a sable *lorcha* that was nosing in their direction. A light wind had sprung up and the strange sails were bellying to the breeze. Then the native's eyes flicked toward the schooner, now drawing away. Watenabe had taken over command and would return to Manila as swiftly as possible. If Kit Morton was dead, the count would be able to complete his program unmolested, but he must hurry. Others might take steps to block his efforts.

"Let him go. We fix," Datu Dak said, his wrinkled face lined by a fierce smile. "To-night I take *la jura*, the oath."

"La jura?"

Swimming with the ease of a seal, the old man turned and struck out toward the sable *lorcha*. Kit Morton followed. He realized that the old beggar he had seen in front of Ernesto Lopez' home had been playing a part in the maze of Filipino politics, but he could not imagine him as a prospective aid. After all, he had sent Nunez to look into the old man's activity, and Nunez had been killed.

The schooner was rounding the point, heading for Manila. A good sailorman, like all Japanese, Count Watenabe had broken out both sails and jibs to aid the motor. Kit watched his little ship disappear. Then he increased his strokes and caught up with Datu Dak. A few minutes later, they scrambled aboard the *lorcha*.

"I tell him follow." Dak nodded to the skipper of the native craft. "He savvy what I do." Datu Dak began stripping off his dripping clothes. Soon he was half-naked, a gnarled figure, the color of a bronze statue which had mellowed with the centuries. Years had marked the old chief's face, but his body had the sturdy lines of middle years.

Kit followed his companion's example. It would require some hours to return to Manila, but he must get back as soon as possible. Watenabe would work at top speed now. He would either force Ernesto Lopez to complete his bargain or find other hands to do the work. Kit had tricked him, but had been tricked in turn.

Then his thoughts turned toward his last moments aboard the schooner. Watenabe had thrown beer into his eyes. What had saved him from instant death? He turned to ask Datu Dak. The old man was chewing betel nut, spitting a crimson stream over the *lorcha's* rail.

"I guess I forgot to thank you for saving my life," Kit said.

Datu Dak shook his head and grinned. Then he squatted on the deck and motioned Kit to take a seat beside him. He stared out at the blue waters for a while before he began speaking.

"Long time ago Jolo warrior like you," he said, glancing at the American. "You blinded, but still fight. I come out of hold, but they start shooting at me. I dive overboard. 'Nother time, I get Japanese, but first get Tagalo."

"You mean Lopez?"

Datu Dak nodded, baring teeth that were crimson with the juice of the betel nuts.

"Long time ago," he resumed, "Datu Dak was number-one head-hunter. Get all kinds head, white head, brown, yellow—many head. But old days gone. White man come, change law. White man law against head-hunting. Now white man go, Filipino make law once more."

MORTON nodded, but an expression of puzzlement came into his eyes when he saw a grin cross the old man's withered face.

"So Dak go back to old laws," the Moro chuckled.

"You mean—head-hunting?"

The former Sultan of Jolo nodded, and held up a gnarled finger. "One." he said.

"But you can't. That's against—" He paused as Datu Dak raised his hand.

"Lopez worst enemy Filipino has. All Tagalo bad man. Lopez worst Tagalo." Thus the Moro spoke his hatred of a leader whose tribe was his ancient enemy.

"They'll hang you," Kit warned, as the old man chewed his betel nut reflectively.

Once more the withered face broke into a thousand wrinkles. "This neck never feel rope. I take the oath," he answered. He spat contemplatively over the side. Then he looked at Kit, his shadowed eyes alive with animation.

"You got work. I got work. Both have same end. You come with me. You can't be Navy man, no more. Lopez see. You can't be schooner man. Watenabe see. Be Moro. You like?"

"Say, that's a great idea. I was wondering what I was going to do."

The wind increased, but it was a hot, searing one that added to the misery of sun-baked Manila. Evening found them in the city, following teeming streets into the Moro section. Kit Morton wondered how he could get in touch with Ralph Dayton and Arturo, his half-easte aid. He must get word to them, yet they would not report to the regular rendezvous before midnight. And he was following Datu Dak into the heart of the Mohammedan colony.

The *lorcha's* chest had given him his costume, and he had darkened his skin. Dak had wound his turban in the manner of the young men of his tribe, and had told him he would vouch for him at a meeting of the Jolo brotherhood.

They passed more winding streets, and finally dodged down a flight of stairs beside one of the many betel nut shops dotting the settlement. Kit Morton stared around as he entered a long, dimly lighted room. It was crowded with natives, not the yellow-faced, Chinese-looking Tagalos of Luzon, but powerful brown men of Malay origin.

The side walls were marked with batiques bearing Arabic quotations from the *Koran*. Behind a small platform was the sanctuary enshrining the interlaced monograms of Allah and Mohammed. A bearded priest, whose green turban told of a pilgrimage to Mecca, was kneeling before the altar as they entered. His prayers ended, he turned to hold out a welcoming hand to Datu Dak.

Kit stared at the strange assemblage. But for Datu Dak's protection, he could not have lived thirty seconds in that smoke-filled room. He heard a murmur as the old sultan turned to face his countrymen. Strangely enough, he spoke in Spanish. Morton wondered at this for a moment. Then he remembered that there were as many dialects among the Mohammedan Filipinos as among the Christians.

"I have failed in my mission, Brothers of the Faith," the old man said, "so I have come to take the oath."

Once more that word—*la jura*. Belatedly Kit Morton remembered its significance among the Moros. Datu Dak was going *juramentado*. It was a purely Malay custom, like going *amok*, only in case of the man's taking the oath, his acts were intentional rather than the result of frenzy.

Squatting among the fierce-faced natives, the American could do nothing. He sat, spellbound, listening to the strange ceremony. Some of it was in the ancient Arabic of the Prophet. Other sections were in Spanish.

"I will neither eat nor drink, sleep nor rest, speak nor listen, falter nor hesitate until the blood of my country's enemy has laid the dust," swore the aged native, his hand upon the *Koran* and his eyes turned toward Mecca.

A solemn stillness gripped the room. Men held their breaths. Then the green-turbaned priest turned to fill the bowl of a *narghileh* with a combination of tobacco and stringy leaf of a much darker shade. Kit Morton stiffened when he saw Datu Dak take up one of the pipe's tubes and place it in his mouth. He would drug himself with hasheesh before he started on his murderous course.

"Will you join me?" The old man pantomimed to the American.

Kit Morton shook his head.

THERE was the soft patter of bare feet upon the dry dirt floor and the American found himself alone. Datu Dak had gone before he realized it. The Moros trooped up the stairs. Kit glanced at his watch and started to his feet. His mind had been dulled by lack of sleep and the strange pageantry of the old chieftain's oath. A flood of realization swept over him. Scarcely realizing that his skin was stained and he was in Moro garb, he hurried from the room and out onto the street.

He hailed the first rattling taxicab and growled an order in Spanish to take him to the *cantina* where he always made rendezvous with Arturo. Ralph Dayton would be there. They must work rapidly or all their plans would be scrapped.

Midnight had come when he hurried into the *cantina* and ordered a glass of beer. The heavy lids of the half-caste behind the bar were raised at the sight of a Moro asking for anything alcoholic. The men from the South used strange drugs and chewed betel nuts constantly, but the law of the Prophet forbade wines or liquors. Still, there were many who were departing from the ways of their fathers.

As he glanced into the mirror, Kit glimpsed Arturo walking impatiently back and forth. His own aid had not recognized him. He gave a signal that brought the man to his side, his Oriental eyes opened wide with wonder.

"Here's a message Dayton left," the half-caste murmured.

Kit glanced at it. It was a wireless from Admiral Gray in answer to the despatch telling of his discoveries.

"Bombing of *Asuma* must be averted"

That and nothing more. The commander-in-chief knew the inevitable result of such an act. Each successive step was plain. Japan would seize the islands, defying America to interfere, and America wanted no war in the Far East. Popular sentiment at home was against conflict to protect islands that cried for liberty and then connived with an imperialistic power when once they were free.

Morton nodded toward a table and then took a chair. Arturo mingled with the crowd. A few minutes later, Ralph Dayton entered, his face pale and anxious. He glanced around the room, his anxiety deepening. Then he saw Arturo gesture toward Morton with his eyes.

Kit tapped on his glass with his nail to attract his aid's attention, then raised his beer glass. Short sips, alternating with long ones meant dots and dashes that spelled the word "outside." Ralph Dayton strolled toward the door. Arturo followed. A few minutes later, Morton joined them.

"Watenabe has a new crew on our schooner," Ralph told Kit, when they found a quiet spot. "They're all Filipinos. He went to Lopez' house and they had an awful row, but Lopez knuckled under. Did you read the old man's wireless?"

Morton nodded. Admiral Gray had issued orders that must be carried out, regardless of the result. That would be Kit's part of the drama. He looked down at the Malay costume he was wearing, and a grin came to his drawn face.

"I've got to get into uniform," he told Ralph. "This is a job that must be done under colors."

"You have one up at my place," Arturo reminded him.

"Yes, and I'm going there. You come with me—and, Ralph, I've got a crazy job for you."

"The crazier the better, skipper."

"I want you to protect Ernesto Lopez. He's in danger, and I don't want him murdered, if I can help it. He—"

He paused as Arturo, the half-caste, grasped his arm. The man pointed to several slinking forms moving slowly in their direction. Light from a near-by building fell on their leader. He was tall, for a Japanese, but the brand of Nippon was upon his face. With him were two *mestizos*. Kit Morton knew for whom they were hunting. He pulled his friends deeper into the darkness.

"Kill him if you find him," the Japanese was saying. "Those are the count's orders."

"But I thought you said he was dead," one of the men replied.

"That man could handicap himself with ten deaths and then survive a cat," was the bitter answer.

Count Watenabe was still on the hunt, and other spies would be combing Manila. Morton wondered what had aroused the nobleman's suspicion. Then he remembered the Moro meeting. Somewhere in that silent gathering, a traitor had squatted, and the word had been passed to the Japanese. Watenabe had a perfect network of spies that penetrated every section of Philippine society. He could get news from the *presidente's* palace or the slums of the waterfront with equal speed.

Lopez, too, would have his minions on the hunt. If the plotters received their information from a Moro spy, they would know Kit's disguise. The quicker he got into American uniform, the better. They would not look for that. The three waited until the Japanese had passed, and then hurried away. Ralph Dayton started for the Lopez home in the Playa district. Kit first went to Arturo's lodgings, where he had a uniform. The half-caste also had the clothing of an American sailor. They would appear as officer and orderly.

MANILA seethed beneath a star-strewn sky. The hot wind died and the palm fronds drooped dejectedly, but in spite of oppressive heat and days and nights without sleep, Kit Morton worked at feverish speed. Once more arrayed in the uniform of his rank, he hurried with Arturo to the waterfront to engage a high-powered speed boat. Arturo tagged at his heels, bearing two suitcases. In one were two knocked-down machine guns. The other contained a portable radio sending and receiving set.

Dawn was near when they took to the waters of the bay and laid a course to where the cruiser *Asuma* was riding at anchor. They were certain Lopez and Watenabe would not wait another day. Perhaps they were too late already. It had taken time to get the machine guns, but it would have been futile to have taken to sea unarmed against an enemy who would fight to the death.

The glow of false dawn was showing as they circled the cruiser, their engine muffled. The *sampans* which had surrounded the warship during the day were gone. Even the service boats had been drawn up on deck, as though Captain Nikijima was preparing to weigh anchor.

"Looks as though they were scared off and had quit," Kit whispered, reducing the power-boat's speed still more.

"Listen."

Arturo raised his hand and pointed toward the city. The faint chug-chug of an auxiliary motor came to their ears. It was from the same type of engines as that Morton had used in his schooner. He twisted the wheel and nosed toward the sound. Then he caught a glimpse of a dim outline. It was the schooner, his schooner. It was heading toward the *Asuma*, its sails catching the faint morning breeze.

"Oyez!" Morton hailed, after the Spanish fashion.

No answer came to his call. He threw the wheel over, and the power-boat veered, ready to cut across the schooner's prow.

"Oyez!" the American bellowed again.

The dazzling beam of a searchlight

lashed out and fixed itself upon him. The appearance of a man in the spotless uniform of a U. S. Navy officer brought consternation to the schooner's deck. America had ruled for a generation at Manila, and the Navy's authority had not been forgotten. But as the crew hesitated, a rasping voice barked swift commands.

"*Cuidado, señor*—careful, sir," Arturo shouted.

Kit Morton dropped when the sputter of a machine gun sounded. Stabs of light appeared on the schooner's deck.

"Take the wheel," the young man called to Arturo.

He snatched up one of his own guns and answered the fire. Yells and curses told that his shots were taking effect. Then he heard Count Watenabe's stilted Spanish urging the cowering Filipinos to carry the battle to the American.

"There are only two of them, you sons of pigs," the Japanese shrilled.

The schooner plowed on, regardless of Morton's frantic bursts of fire. Its wheel was protected. Even if Morton swept the decks, he would be unable to stop the vessel's progress.

He glanced around. The sheer sides of the *Asuma* were only a few yards away. Although a machine-gun battle was raging almost in the shadow of their masts, the Japanese had made no effort to take part in the conflict or throw their searchlights on the contestants.

Frantic bursts were coming from the schooner, drags that held until each brazen clip was exhausted.

"Nose her up closer. We're drifting away," Kit shouted to Arturo.

The man did not answer. Morton looked around. His half-caste aid was sprawled upon the deck, grasping the wheel with weakening grip. A burst from the schooner had mortally wounded him. Even as Kit looked, the man's hand relaxed and he slumped lifelessly. The young man bent over his companion for a moment, then he grasped the wheel himself.

Sheets of fire were coming from the schooner. Morton could not maneuver his own craft and return the fire. Admiral Gray had ordered him to thwart Watenabe's plot, regardless of cost. Only one way remained. He must run the schooner down. The collision might detonate the high explosives, but it would end the plotter's hopes of fomenting war between Japan and America.

THROWING his throttle forward, Kit hurled the power-boat through the water at top speed. He would follow the same tactics as Lopez had used when he tried to kill him and Admiral Gray. The power-boat circled, gaining speed. He straightened on a tangent and lined on the schooner. Less than a hundred yards divided the craft from the *Asuma*. The rails of the cruiser were dotted now with staring faces, looking like small moons in the graying light. Boats were being dropped. Morton got a glimpse of white-clad officers directing the lowering of a gangway. The captain's power gig was going over the side.

From the decks of the schooner came blasts of machine-gun fire. Kit ducked low. He had to hold out until he reached his target. Then they could fire at will. Faster, still faster went the power-boat, the water foaming from its prow. Now only yards divided the two craft. Morton gripped the wheel tighter and gave a final thrust at the throttle.

The engine roared as the exhaust leaped from the water for a second. The little craft plunged like an angry beast. Then came a crash and shivering of timbers. Morton was hurled backward, but he scrambled to his feet. No explosion had followed the impact. He saw the Filipino crew diving over the side and swimming toward the shore. Then he caught a glimpse of Count Watenabe's white-clad figure.

Kit snatched up a sub-caliber machine gun. The schooner and power-boat were still afloat. He raced across his own deck and leaped aboard the schooner.

"Put 'em up! Put 'em up or—" he threatened the count with the automatic rifle.

No answer came from the nobleman,

but he raised his hands. Then he barked words Morton could not understand, and his slant eyes stared venomously.

Then Kit heard voices behind him, and turned to see a dozen Japanese sailors climbing over the schooner's rail. Watenabe spoke to them in their native tongue. An officer appeared and approached Kit Morton.

"Ver' sorry, but must arrest you," the man said with a stiff little bow.

"Better arrest *him*." Kit nodded toward Watenabe. "He was trying to blow up the *Asuma*, and I stopped him."

"Ver' sorry, but I shall have to ask you to tell that to Captain Nikijima. Pliz give me weapon."

"Not until I've seen your skipper," Kit retorted. "Tell your crowd to shoot if—"

He paused as the spotless figure of the *Asuma's* commander appeared. Count Watenabe made a quick appeal, the monotone of his native language rushing out like a stream.

The little captain turned on Morton fiercely. In the first gray of morning, his face looked like a cruel, bloodless mask. His talonlike finger pointed to below decks.

"He say you got explosive. American Navy trying to blow up *Asuma*."

"Lying shop-keeper!" Kit said. He knew how to appeal to the prejudices of a *samurai*.

EVERY line of the captain's angular face told of warrior blood. He was a naval officer and as such he would believe an enemy before he would trust a man of the hated merchant class of his own country.

"What you mean?"

"I mean he has plotted this thing with Lopez, and you know it," Morton shot back. "He wants to be a prince. If he wins, and the Philippines are taken over by your Emperor, he will be Prince Watenabe, and you will still be Captain Nikijima."

"He lie," Watenabe grated. "I show—"

"Yes, show him the T.N.T. you've got down there—all made in Japan by Mitzubishi, of which you are one of the big stockholders. War would bring you rich profits—and kill men like Captain Nikijima. They die for *Dai Nippon*—and you make profits."

Kit Morton watched the effects of his words. The little skipper's face was like a mask, but he saw several junior officers, who understood English, whispering among themselves. Several cast disdainful glances at Watenabe and turned their backs to him. The sailors, understanding not a word, stood like statues, their rifles leveled on the American.

Kit's life, the question of war or peace, and the fate of the Far East were in the balance. Behind Nikijima's inscrutable face, swift thoughts were racing. He held Morton in his power. Just a single word would send bullets crashing through the American's body. The small, almond eyes were appraising Kit's face. Then they shifted to his uniform.

"You American naval officer?"

"You know I am. I met you in Yokohama when you called on Admiral Gray. I was his aid. If you remember—"

"He spy—most dangerous—" Watenabe interrupted.

"Spy do not wear own uniform, Watenabe San," Nikijima broke in. "First we examine cargo. Perhaps he tell truth."

A junior officer was sent below, and returned to report that he had found drums of T.N.T. bearing the Mitzubishi trade mark.

"You have other proofs?" Nikijima asked.

"This man lie," Watenabe burst forth. "He spy. He fight glorious Son of the Sun. He make war against *Dai Nippon*. I am only humble servant of Emperor, who—"

"Who would be prince," the captain put in. "I sorry for you, Watenabe San, but if Honorable Lieutenant has other proof—"

"I have." Kit stepped forward.

The time had come when he must try a good old American bluff. He held aces in his hand, but not enough. He must play as though he had all four.

"What proof?" Watenabe demanded.

"A dictaphone record of your talk with Ernesto Lopez, arranging for this crime. In it, you offer him in the Emperor's name the title of Prince of Luzon. You tell of Japanese plans for an Asian empire. Geneva will hear that record—and laugh."

A sudden change came over Nikijima's deeply lined face. The swiftly rising sun disclosed a dark crimson stain. He turned to bark an order to one of his junior officers. A moment later, a square of Japanese sailors surrounded Count Watenabe.

The skipper of the *Asuma* turned to Kit and bowed stiffly from the hips.

"Civilians always make trouble," he said. "We naval officers must guard honor of our countries. Won't you have breakfast with me?"

KIT MORTON had no time for breakfast with the skipper of the *Asuma*, however. Too much remained undone. He had bluffed when he said he had a dictaphone record of the conversation between Watenabe and Ernesto Lopez. He must get that record. It would be the keystone of his case.

He paused long enough to ask Captain Nikijima for the use of his power gig to take him ashore.

Out on the quay, he climbed into a taxicab and gave the address of the Lopez home in the Playa district. The sun was climbing, adding to the sultry heat. The palm fronds were lifeless. The only persons on the street were native servants or Chinese vegetable-peddlers.

As he reached the avenue in which the senator lived, Morton saw a crowd of servants rushing toward the house. Shrieks and yells tore the early morning quiet. Then he heard the sound of revolver shots.

Kit leaped from his taxicab and rushed up the steps. Hands were raised to stay him, but they shook him off.

"*Americano* in there. Him dead," a voice called.

Ralph Dayton had stayed on the job, then and had fought until cut down.

"Who did it?" Kit Morton asked a house boy.

"Moro—*juramentado*."

Then Datu Dak had finally run his enemy to earth. Filled with hasheesh, he would kill both friend and enemy in order to reach the man he had sworn upon the *Koran* to destroy.

"Let me in." Kit surged through the crowd.

"But, *señor*, they'll—"

More shots came from within the house. Morton shook himself free and charged across the wide veranda. Soon he was in the dim entrance hall, staring up the stairs. He saw Ralph Dayton's crumpled figure at the foot of the steps, and examined him hurriedly, but found no wounds. He dragged him out onto the porch and raised his eyelids. Ralph looked up and mumbled a word or two.

"Knocked out, that's all," Kit murmured, and ordered some of the Filipinos to take Dayton to the nearest hospital.

In the house again he heard voices from the upper floor, and recognized the grating tones of Datu Dak. Filled with hasheesh, the man was a maniac, determined on the destruction of his enemy.

Morton mounted the stairs, three steps at a time. He reached the upper hall to see Ernesto Lopez holding Datu Dak at bay with a pistol.

"Save me, *señor*," Lopez pleaded to Kit.

"Where are those dictagraph records?" the American demanded. "You got them back. Where are they?"

"In my office—in the filing cabinet, but save me. Save me from that Moro devil and I'll—"

"Watch out, *señor*. I do not want to kill you," Datu Dak warned Morton, "but I will if I must. I have taken the *jura*, you know that."

The old head-hunter was advancing down the hall. Lopez had a revolver in his hand, but the one-time Sultan of Jolo did not hesitate.

"Stop, Datu Dak," Kit called. "Stop and I'll—"

"Only Allah can stop me," the old man retorted. "I have taken the oath."

Kit Morton reached for his gun, then

realized that he was unarmed. He could do nothing. To wrestle with Datu Dak meant quick death. Dak had a poisoned *kris* in his hand. At one touch from its lethal point, all would be over.

"Shoot! For God's sake, shoot! He's crazy, and I can do nothing," Kit told the trembling Filipino.

Lopez raised his revolver. Only half a dozen steps divided him and the Moro. There was a roaring explosion as the weapon was discharged. A spot appeared on Dak's chest, and he staggered from the impact of the bullet tearing through his flesh.

Then his lean, brown legs gathered themselves and he advanced at an even pace, his wrinkled face set into the hard, unyielding lines of a bronze statue of vengeance. Kit Morton stared with unbelieving eyes. These could not be real men, real knives, real bullets. It was too much like a stage play.

Another shot roared out.

THE gun in Lopez' hand was shaking, but he steadied himself for another shot. Dak had raised his *kris*. He was ready to give and to receive the death blow. His aged eyes were flashing.

A third shot all but knocked the old man from his feet.

Ernesto Lopez looked foolishly at his pistol. He had put three bullets in the aged native's body and still he came on, unbending, the incarnation of fate.

Kit stooped as he saw Datu Dak shift the *kris* in his hand, holding the blade between his thumb and finger. Then he hurled himself at the old man. They crashed to the floor and, when the American scrambled to his feet, the *kris* was no longer in the wrinkled brown hand.

"Now—" Morton turned to Lopez.

The Filipino was staring at him, his slant-eyes wide with horror. Imbedded in his heart was the poisoned *kris*. Datu Dak had hurled it as Kit leaped. Foam came to Lopez' lips. He made no attempt to remove the blade, but clutched at his throat, spun crazily and plunged forward.

Lopez was dead, but Datu Dak's warlike spirit had not yet flown.

"I make good *la jura*," he whispered, when Kit bent over him. *"Viva los Filipinos. Viva—la libertad. Yo me voy*—I am going—" There was a throaty rattle, and the soul of Datu Dak was on its way.

Kit Morton straightened up and went into Ernesto Lopez' work room. The dictaphone records were where the senator had told him.

"It's a record I want Captain Nikijima to hear," Kit told the admiral a week later in Hongkong.

But the dapper little captain never heard it. Count Watenabe sought flight in *hara kiri*, and a staid court of inquiry found that he was an insane man. This done, the Japanese government voted to give Lieutenant Christopher Morton, U. S. N., the Order of the Rising Sun for saving a Japanese man-of-war.

"But I can't take it, sir," the young man said to the admiral.

"I would," the veteran commander laughed, a little bitterly. "Their next gift may be—bullets made in America."

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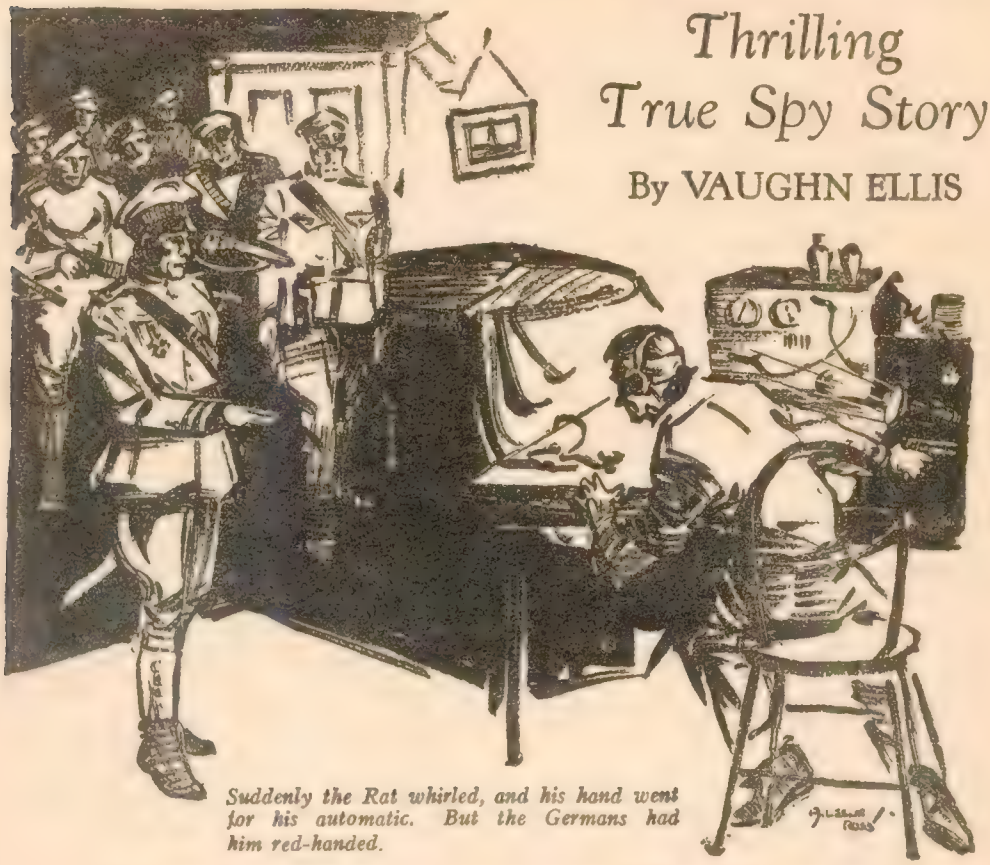
COURIER OF DARKNESS

Thrilling True Spy Story

By VAUGHN ELLIS



Suddenly the Rat whirled, and his hand went for his automatic. But the Germans had him red-handed.

One of the most gripping true stories of World War espionage is the tale of K-6—that daredevil American spy known to German Intelligence only as the Rat. Night after night, behind the German lines, a fierce battle of wits was waged between hunters and hunted. Night after night, the Rat wreaked havoc in German munitions depots, and escaped. Then fate played a strange trick—for where all the great aces of German Intelligence had failed, one who had never heard of the name of K-6 was to find the secret of his hiding place.

IN the latter months of the World War, the German High Command was greatly perturbed by the deadly accuracy with which the American forces were shelling supposedly secret munition depots. That there was a leak somewhere within the German lines, or that the Americans were being informed by a master secret agent, there was no doubt. It was putting Germany in a tight situation, but the chagrin occasioned by the thought that they were being outwitted by a crafty Secret Service agent was a bitter pill to swallow.

At a special conference of the High Command, they discussed ways and means of running down the enemy within the lines. The result was a gruff command to their Intelligence officers to get busy and seize the offenders post haste.

The continued losses of great munition caches had worried the German officers for many weeks. Supposedly secure munition depots had suddenly been subjected to an intense salvo of heavy, long-range guns, and had been wiped out.

German Intelligence officers began a hasty survey of all the munition losses, and gathered all data obtainable. They soon had fifteen hundred picked men scattered over that territory behind those lines which contained sizable depots of munitions. This force was ordered to be on the alert at all times and to report instantly any single action of suspicion.

Behind the German lines, there roamed an American secret agent by the name of John Dixon. His identity was suspected, even though he had never been captured. The German Intelligence had taken it for granted that the great destructions of vast depots must be the work of a daring American agent, and they had already dubbed him the "Rat." They had come to the conclusion that the wily American must hole in during the day, and venture forth on his dangerous work in the dark of night. Thus they chose the nickname.

John Dixon was quite unaware that such a name was given him by the Germans. He had been in American Secret Service for many years, and was known as "K-6." He had not used his real name of Dixon for so long a time that it would seem odd to hear it.

With the lines of the German Intelligence drawn in a virtual honeycomb, and with a determined personnel active as bees, it seemed as though any further destruction of depots would be soon eliminated. However, despite the vigilance of the Germans, ammunition depots and storage plants continued to be destroyed, regularly and thoroughly.

The High Command was nearly driven to desperation. The German Intelligence was sorely humiliated. With a snarl of anger, the High Command had ordered that another thousand picked men should be enlisted to hunt down the Rat. There was now no doubt that the destruction was the work of one or several American agents within the German lines.

Inside of ten days, things began to get hot. A corporal, standing beside a dugout and enjoying a cigarette while his buddies were asleep, was suddenly cracked over the head and fell in an unconscious heap. When he came to, in the darkness, and gave the alarm, several things were quickly discovered to be missing—a motorcycle, a pair of shoes, a pair of sox, one shirt, and one carton of cigarettes. The news was flashed all up and down the line, and all motorcycles were being stopped and checked.

That same night, and only a few minutes after those thefts, a company cook house was broken into, and as the guard rushed up at the noise, he was felled by a blow to the jaw. His assailant jumped on a motorcycle and dashed off into the night. A subsequent search revealed that a nice, whole, cooked chicken was among the missing. Orders flew thick and fast from headquarters, and the German Intelligence heads began to feel that they would shortly overhaul their man. He was evidently desperate for food and clothes.

Three days later, and at one minute after midnight, there was a deafening roar from a wooded section eight miles to the rear of the strong first-line trenches. It was just another immense depot of munitions, and it had gone up in a cloud of smoke as the Yankee guns peppered it with huge shells. There was no trace of anyone's being near by when the explosion took place, no one who was in any way suspicious looking.

TWENTY-EIGHT miles due northwest from those German lines was a small hydro-electric plant, which at one time had belonged to a French corporation. After the first big German advance, this had been taken over by the Kaiser's troops. The plant had been left running, as it served the Headquarters staff for many purposes. It was only a small plant, with the power house about a mile down the river from the small office which was looked after by *Haupt-*

mann Hans Strumberg, who shared the duties with *Hauptmann* Gustav Diehl.

Directly across the narrow roadway from *Hauptmann* Strumberg's office stood an old, abandoned, two-story stone house, upon which arose a huge tower. This building was probably over a century old. It was covered with heavy ivy, and the signs of decay and neglect were quite obvious. In its abandoned state, it gave the beholder a feeling of coldness, and its damp atmosphere made it fairly secure from visitation. It was as forbidding and mysterious-looking as a haunted house.

In the damp, cold tower of this house was fashioned a large round room, approximately forty feet in diameter. Two doors led from this room, and opened into two rooms each of about eight feet by ten. At the east side of the main room, there stood, in years-old dust and mold, an old-time wireless apparatus. It was of such antiquated date as to seem useless, and the Germans had early disconnected the wiring as a measure of safety.

As Captain Strumberg sat in his office at the light plant, he suddenly jumped to his feet as a thought flashed through his mind. He remembered now that a strange happening occurred every night at just about the time an ammunition depot was destroyed. An old mongrel dog of abandoned French ownership was a constant companion in the office. Strumberg recalled now that on each occasion, when the American shelled an ammunition dump, this old dog would busy himself sniffing and growling. The captain had on several occasions gone out to investigate, and, on finding nothing wrong, had laid the dog's activity to his old age, or else to the closeness of some wild animal or bird.

When, two nights later, a guard challenged a motorcyclist and was in the act of waving him on, he was suddenly banged on the head with a revolver butt. When he awoke, it was to find that a new motorcycle had vanished and an old one had been left in its place.

There were many roads leading up in the general direction of the power plant, and for a short distance the stolen motorcycle was traced in that direction. But the rough condition of the much-traveled roads did not reveal any one track clearly enough to give the Germans a chance to follow.

One hour and twenty minutes after this bold dash by K-6, an immense munition cache was bombarded and destroyed by the American heavy guns. Not until some minutes after the destruction of this large cache was *Hauptmann* Strumberg notified by telephone of the attack on the guard, and the theft of the motorcycle. He had once more noted the growling of the dog, and at one moment imagined he had heard the rush of a motorcycle.

However, at the point beside the river where the office stood, there was an ever-whining wind, due, no doubt, to the canyonlike contour of the location. The sound of the wind, in turn was echoed noisily by the onward rush of the river below. *Herr* Strumberg could almost imagine he heard anything in this mixture of wind and gurgling waters.

Immediately, he called up headquarters and made his report. His information was regarded as the best turned in to date. Headquarters feverishly organized a squad under the very able Colonel Pfaff, and was immediately dispatched to the power-plant office.

Hastily examining the road, and quite positive of fresh cycle tracks, Col. Pfaff entered the old abandoned building with his squad, consisting of two captains and eight men with rifles. With great care, every niche and corner was gone over, and none gave any indication of recent occupancy.

Suddenly, with an exclamation of triumph, one of the men who was examining the old wireless set, motioned the colonel to come. Here was a work of art. As they examined it minutely, they learned how the Rat had pieced and patched this old junk together so that it could function once more. The key was dustless and smooth, and this was evidence enough of its recent use.

"We'll have that fellow soon, now,"

said the colonel triumphantly. "His hours are numbered."

A FURTHER search revealed a secret door in the wall panel. Inside, was room enough for twenty men to huddle into comfortably. The colonel began giving instructions. There must be no smoking and no talking out loud after nightfall of the next day. The eight men with rifles were to stay inside the secret room. Just as soon as night came on, the two captains and the colonel were to join them and remain there all night if necessary. Nothing in the room must be touched or disturbed.

Pfaff's plan was to ward off any suspicion of their presence in the house. It was decided to let the Rat come in unmolested, and then jump out and cover him while he was in the act of sending a wireless.

With their plans all cut and dried, and with eagerness in all their faces, there was nothing to do now but wait. The Rat would have to climb the rounding stairway leading up to the tower, and the creaking of the old stairs would give them timely warning of his coming.

The next day broke in with a steady, dismal rain. The tower was saturated in cold and dampness. It was a long time to put in waiting, though the men whisperingly rehearsed the parts they were to play with the coming of the Rat.

That night, at a few minutes after ten o'clock, there was a rush at the foot of the stairs, and *Hauptmann* Strumberg called up, "He's coming, colonel, he's coming!"

Rushing into the room, the much excited Strumberg, panting for breath had just been called on the phone. The message said that a motorcycle, with its rider wearing the uniform of a headquarters messenger, had attempted to dash by a lone guard on a side road. The guard took a flying shot at the man and tumbled him in a heap.

As the guard rushed up to examine him, the man suddenly moved and covered his captor with a pistol. Then the spy forced the guard to get out his kit case and bandage the wound, which was a severe gash in the scalp above the ear. It was bleeding badly, and the spy had warned the guard to "hurry it up." He then took away the guard's gun and hurled it over the embankment.

As he started for his cycle, the guard whipped out a hidden automatic, but the Rat turned quickly and fired first. He had rushed away, leaving the guard mortally wounded. The German had lived long enough to tell his story to a comrade who soon came up.

He managed to gasp, "He's headed—toward the power plant. And he's going—like a bat out of—hell . . ."

Quickly, the colonel gave orders, and every man rushed into the secret chamber, including Strumberg. All were ordered to remove their shoes to quiet their footsteps, and no one was even allowed to whisper. The colonel knelt with one eye glued to the peek-hole, and the trap was set.

K-6 was a tough-looking object as he started, catlike, up the stairs. He had been months in the German lines, and the hunting and being hunted was beginning to tell. With face pale and deep lines showing, he was paying for the hardships of his trade. There was lack of sleep, and scanty food, and hiding in mud holes and in damp cellars, and no one to talk to, and fighting alone. It was tough going, but he liked it.

Suddenly a flash of light shot up the stairway and sent its rays feebly into the main room. Instantly, it was put out.

"Flashlights," whispered Colonel Pfaff. "It's the Rat—he's here!"

Soon another flash appeared and was quickly turned out. K-6 was coming up the stairs very cautiously—it seemed like hours to the men waiting. So tense were they all that they could hear their hearts beat in the dim silence of the room. It was many minutes before another flash showed. He was close to the top, now—must be crawling on his hands and knees, it was taking so long. He was alert with eyes, ears, and nostrils, this daredevil

Rat. There was darkness for quite a stretch, and then the room suddenly burst into a flare of light as the flash turned full into the room.

WATCHING through the keyhole, the colonel saw the flash quickly search out every part of the room, and then it seemed to rest steadily upon an old table at a short distance from the wireless. With the flashlight held up at arm's length above him, the Rat was lying on his side almost flat on the floor; he was taking no chances on a bullet being sent at his light. The flare swept around the room once more, and then again rested its full glow upon the table.

As the colonel intently watched, it suddenly dawned on him that the table cover, a heavy curtainlike drape, had been pushed down so that it covered the legs and shut off any vision beneath the table from the side which faced the Rat. This had been caused by a soldier who had been sitting on the table when he had hastily slid off.

It was this disturbed condition of the tablecloth which seemed to hold the Rat's attention. He held the light steadily on it for a full minute. There was a chair directly beside the door and in easy reach of K-6. Slowly and quietly he reached out with his free arm and gripped the chair. With the flare still directed at the table, he crawled to his knees, leaped to his feet like a flash, and whirled the chair along the floor straight for the cover hanging over the table's side.

As the chair sped on its way, he grabbed his automatic from the hand which also held the flash, and his aim was following the chair as it swept beneath the table and dragged the cover on under with it. Seemingly quite satisfied on finding no one hidden beneath the table, he quickly slipped over and cautiously opened the door first of one, and then the other, of the two small rooms which adjoined the main room. With the pistol following the flare as he inspected each of the bare rooms, he found the coast was clear.

But he was not yet satisfied. Of the six chairs which occupied the room, he quickly went to each and placed a hand upon the seat. Finding no warmth showing recent occupancy, he then slipped over to the door which he had entered at the head of the stairs, closed it quietly, and placed a chair against the knob to bar any entrance. Now satisfied that all was quite well, he removed the heavy coat and cap, lit a cigarette, and strode over to the wireless. Placing his flashlight on the wireless table so that it would render sufficient light to his work and also to light up the room itself, he proceeded to tap the key.

In the glare of the flashlight, this master agent presented a weird sight. Pale and dirty from constant exposure to the elements, and with his head swathed in a white bandage through which, at a point above the left ear, there appeared a mottled blotch of crimson, he sat tensely before the apparatus and started to click off a message in code.

Scarcely ten seconds from the start of the Rat's message, Colonel Pfaff touched his flashlight faintly as the signal of readiness. With his eye still at the peek-hole, and his ears listening at the key, he was in the act of sliding the door open when he suddenly changed his mind. The Rat, sensing something wrong, or, more than likely taking extra precaution, had suddenly jumped away from the wireless and flashed his light quickly about the entire room, with the ever-ready automatic set for action.

As he again resumed the key, the door of the secret chamber opened and the German squad, in stocking feet, quietly slipped into the main room. The wireless was sputtering away with a message, and the noise of the apparatus and the disadvantage of earphones combined was a severe handicap in the matter of hearing to K-6.

The old wireless was going good. K-6 had got his station. All was clear. Now for the message. Sputter! Sputter! Sputter! Sputter! Suddenly he hesitated, with his hand on the key. Something was wrong. He stopped altogether

on his message. Something was wrong! Like a flash his hand gripped the automatic, and he whirled at the same instant.

Slowly, his fingers loosened their grip on his gat. Presently the gun slid from his grasp. He couldn't use it—not a chance. They had him red-handed, and he knew it. There, in front of him, with no word of mouth, stood eight German riflemen, four behind four, and the eight muzzles of their guns were aimed at his heart.

Instinctively, his hands went up, and his eyes slowly looked from the guns to the three officers alongside. The tense silence was soon broken as K-6 addressed the colonel.

Nonchalantly, he remarked in excellent German, "You fellows just can't get away from that damned mass formation, can you?" His words had a sting of sarcasm, and a faint, contemptuous smile flickered across his face.

HE was quickly seized by *Hauptmann* Diehl and Strumberg, and hastily searched for weapons and papers. Finding nothing of import in the hurried frisk, the colonel ordered K-6 to be bound, hand and foot. A rope of rather thin texture was used for this purpose. It happened to be the only rope handy in the room. The colonel had not planned on tying the prisoner. Feeling secure in the strength of numbers, the colonel thought the matter of securing the prisoner was of light importance.

With his hands bound together at the wrists, the prisoner was further secured by a short length of rope which reached from his hands, resting on the small of his back, to an old iron hook protruding from the brick wall of the room. With the added precaution of roping the prisoner's ankles, the stage was set for the intended grilling, and the eight soldiers were ordered to stack their rifles against the wall and stand by. The four officers, however, retained their side arms.

Replacing the flashlights with an old lantern which a soldier brought from the secret chamber made the room fairly light as the trial got under way. Seated at the table, Colonel Pfaff and the three captains presented a stern appearance as they arranged note pads and pencils preparatory to their questioning. The eight privates, seated on the floor, and with the wall at their backs, looked on eagerly and in silence. The prisoner, calm and resigned for the ordeal, gazed on sullenly. As the colonel nodded his readiness, *Hauptmann* Diehl and *Hauptmann* Danz poised their pencils to take down the transcript.

Eyeing the prisoner narrowly, the colonel asked, "What is your name?"

The American answered, "I have no name, sir—merely a number."

"And what is the number?"

"You must know, sir, that my number cannot be revealed."

"How long have you been behind our lines?"

"I don't care to answer."

"How many of our ammunition depots have you reported and had destroyed?" The colonel leaned forward as he put this question.

"All I could locate."

"Don't you know the exact number?" the colonel persisted.

"All that have been blown up, I guess." There was a faint trace of amusement in K-6's eyes as he answered.

"How many of our men have you murdered in your rampages?"

At this question, *Hauptmann* Strumberg advanced close to the prisoner, as if to force the truth by glowering into the eyes of the American. Ever cruel and ruthless, Strumberg was wholly despised even among his own people for his lack of self-control.

"I murdered no one," came the answer clearly.

"Liar!" yelled Strumberg, and with a resounding crack, he landed a clenched fist squarely on the red mark of the prisoner's bandaged head. K-6 slumped slightly, but made no sound.

"Enough of that, *Hauptmann* Strumberg!" thundered Colonel Pfaff. "This is not your business." The colonel arose from his chair, and hurled a fierce stream

of German invective at his subordinate. He ordered Captain Strumberg from the room with humiliating contempt.

"Go back to your office where you belong, and stay there!" he shouted, pointing to the door.

"Very well, sir. But allow me, please, to present the Rat with a nice American cigarette before I go. It may soothe his troubled nerves." Strumberg was far from daunted.

Walking over to K-6, he drew from his pocket a fancy cigarette case, and, taking a cigarette from it, he placed it between the prisoner's lips. Striking a match, he held it momentarily, then suddenly blew it out and snatched the cigarette from the American's lips.

"You want a cigarette," he mockingly drawled. Then he laughed long and loud in derision. "Try and get one." He grinned, and said softly, "If you really do want some cigarettes, come on down to my office at your convenience and I will give you a full package of nice American cigarettes, and I'll even give you a nice silver cigarette case to hold them."

Then he added, "Over my dead body! Understand? Over my dead body, you can get them!" He flicked his fingers in the prisoner's face and with a loud laugh strutted for the door, while, with gritted teeth, K-6 coldly eyed the departing Strumberg.

DUE to the terrific blow upon the wound, a heavy trickle of blood ran down the American's cheek, and found its way down his neck and beneath his shirt.

"Take care of that wound," ordered the colonel, addressing *Hauptmann* Diehl. Diehl immediately removed the discolored bandage and dressed it anew very carefully, placing a fresh, clean bandage on the cut.

"Thank you," said the American simply.

Colonel Pfaff, firm soldier and a born gentleman, offered his apology for the actions of Captain Strumberg. "I'm sorry it happened," he told the American. "I shall see that he is severely reprimanded for this."

Leaning over the table, Colonel Pfaff momentarily studied his prisoner. He could not but admire this courageous prize of war, who was fighting for his cause single-handed against tremendous odds. He beheld in the prisoner a man close to forty years, of a lean but extremely wiry build. The face was keen and filled with determination, and the steel-blue eyes were as steady and unflinching as the eyes of an eagle. There was about this American a quiet air of supreme self-confidence. He was the right sort of man for his trade. One could see that a man like this would somehow manage to execute his mission, no matter how desperate the chances.

Resuming the examination, Colonel Pfaff asked again, "Have you ever killed any of our men, and if so, how many?"

"I do not know, colonel. I have been obliged at times to battle suddenly at close quarters, and to get away as best I could. If some of your men have died as a result of those fights, you are no doubt in a better position to number the casualties than am I. I had no time nor inclination to stand by and watch a man breathe his last. My orders are to destroy stores of supplies and ammunition—not men. I could have killed hundreds of your men, had I wanted to, but my work is far bigger than that. I know you understand."

The colonel nodded. "How did you manage to hook up that old wireless?" he asked.

"Easy enough," replied K-6. "I made a raid on one of your supply houses one night when I first got behind your lines, and took the necessary stuff to put the old thing in working order. Pretty good job, don't you think?"

The colonel smiled vaguely. His prisoner was getting just a bit cocky, he thought.

"You are of a somewhat inventive nature, I take it, judging from the manner you put that wireless back in commission."

"Oh, yes, I guess I am," laughed K-6.

"In fact, I invented a little device which I figured would get me out of just such a predicament as I appear to be in right now." There was a slight air of defiance to the smile that closed his sentence.

K-6 could see a perceptible stiffening of their muscles as the officers straightened slightly in their chairs. They fixed their eyes on the American in a steady glare of mingled perplexity and disdain. The eight soldiers at the wall stirred slightly in anticipation.

Continuing, and speaking in a low, clear voice that had no tone of bravado, K-6 addressed them. "Gentlemen, you regard me as your prisoner. I assure you the reverse is true."

As though dealing with a madman, his listeners merely waited for more words to come. The spy hesitated, to allow his words to seep in, and then surveyed his audience casually, that he might weigh the effect.

K-6 went on quietly, "The device of which I have spoken, and which is my own invention, is a leather belt fitted about my waist and next to my body. On it, and in the small of my back, there is attached a contrivance which, when a small spring is released, flips a razor-sharp knife facing outwardly from my back. On each side of this knife there is attached a very flat, specially built automatic. Also, there is a short dagger."

An air of incredulity appeared on the faces of his listeners as he suddenly announced. "At this instant, gentlemen, allow me to inform you, that I have succeeded in cutting the bonds you placed on me, and that in each hand I hold a fully loaded pistol. I want you three officers to quietly remove your belts and toss your guns in the middle of the floor. If there is a false move among you, it is going to be your hard luck. Colonel, you will remove yours first, then the captain on your left, and lastly the captain to your right. My reason for this, gentlemen, is that I must of necessity bend over to cut the rope at my ankles, and I don't care to be in such a position with your guns at your sides. Proceed."

He was greeted by loud laughs from the officers as he finished.

"You are a typical American bluffer," said *Hauptmann* Diehl, smiling.

"Search him thoroughly," Colonel Pfaff ordered *Hauptmann* Danz. The German captain arose from his chair to obey orders.

"Just one moment," spoke the American. "If any man in this room advances past that broken floor board in my direction, it means sure death. If any one of you wishes to commit suicide, there is no more certain method."

"Go!" The chief motioned to his captain.

RUSHING in swiftly toward K-6, *Hauptmann* Danz suddenly pitched face forward in a heap as the American whipped from behind an automatic and fired. There was a deathlike silence in the room as the Germans realized they were trapped.

Quickly bringing both guns into view, K-6 barked out his orders: "Get busy now, all of you—do what I say! You two officers throw your guns on the floor and see that you are damned quick about it."

Turning to the soldiers, who had jumped to their feet in their excitement and fear, he called, "You fellows file into that room there, and don't try to get out!"

The men quickly obeyed. Colonel Pfaff and *Hauptmann* Diehl had already removed their gun belts and tossed them to the floor.

Not until then did K-6 quickly stoop over and cut the rope at his feet. "Take this rope, captain, and bind the colonel's hands and feet," ordered the American. When the pale German had finished roping his chief, the American ordered Diehl to enter the remaining small room not occupied by the soldiers.

Placing a chair as a brace under the door knob of each of the rooms, K-6 returned quickly to the colonel, neatly reinforced the rope-made handcuffs, and then carried the German to the iron hook to which he himself had recently been

bound, and made the colonel quite fast to it. He apologized to the German officer as he placed a gag in his mouth.

"I'll remove that in a few minutes, colonel," he promised, "but I must drop down and see *Hauptmann* Strumberg and get those cigarettes he promised me. I'll be right back."

But before starting on his call to Captain Strumberg, K-6 stepped over to the wireless, slipped on the earphones, and tapped the key. At once he got his station and sent the words, "Apparatus repaired. Dope shortly." Why tell them his troubles? They have troubles of their own—that's the code of Secret Service workers.

Rushing hurriedly from the place, gun in hand, K-6 dashed out into the night, to keep his revenge rendezvous.

Struggling hard to loosen the bonds which held him, Colonel Pfaff soon realized it was too good a bit of work to be undone. In a few minutes, footsteps were on the stairs, and K-6 re-entered the room. He stood for a moment looking at Colonel Pfaff, and, reaching in his pocket, drew forth a silver cigarette case and proffered a smoke to the German. Colonel Pfaff mutely raised his eyebrows questioningly.

"No—I just gave *Herr* Strumberg a little scare," he said, with a grim smile.

"I wouldn't have blamed you," were the colonel's words the moment K-6 removed the gag. "Captain Strumberg is a disgrace to the service. You are merciful, *Herr Amerikaner.*"

Reaching into a hidden cubbyhole of the old wireless table, K-6 drew forth a soiled and somewhat crumpled fold of paper. Opening it up and spreading it out in front of the German, he said, "This map, colonel, as you see, is scaled at two hundred foot to the square, with each square given a number. In this sector here—" his finger traced the map—"which is known to you as section number nine, there are three ammunition dumps. You know this, and so do I—but while you know the sectional square number of each of those dumps, I am sorry to say that I possess the exact square location of two only."

K-6 paused, and his face had hardened again to the cold mask of the spy. "I will command you, sir, to mark on this map the three locations," he said quietly. "If you mark the two wrong which I happen to know, it will be quite evident that you are also marking wrong the one which I want to locate. I will give you five minutes to decide. If you see fit to grant my request, it will please me very much. If, on the other hand, you refuse my request, you must not count on me for any favor in return."

AS the American finished, he watched the German, whose face was set in lines of deep thought. Colonel Pfaff possessed the knowledge that the three munition dumps in question had been moved to another sector that very afternoon. Here was his chance to trade. His eyes rested on the body of *Hauptmann* Danz lying a few feet away.

After long moments, the colonel spoke. "In the event I give this information, will you guarantee the safety of my men?" His face was haggard. He had made his decision.

"Absolutely, colonel. You will all be unharmed," the American assured him.

Holding the map close to the colonel's tightly bound hands, K-6 placed a pencil between the German's fingers, and a dot was placed in each of three particular squares.

"Thanks, colonel."

K-6 stepped over to the wireless and once more started on the key. For several minutes he busily reeled off his message, and then stood for some time with the earphones on as he got instructions back. They had cut in on his message, and he received a strange answer from his station.

"Hold her, kid," came back the informal, hilarious words. "Give us two only to-night. We can't be bothered with three—" And as the words continued to come to the American, he jumped from his seat, the headphones still on, and started doing a small edition of buck and wing to let out his overburdened joy.

Colonel Pfaff looked on in amazement, and he wondered if the man had gone mad.

Yanking off his headgear, K-6 turned and waltzed over to Colonel Pfaff. There was a deep smile on the American's face. Leaning close to the German, K-6 placed a hand over the bound wrists of his prisoner and said, "Colonel, as between two men in the same line of work, let me say this—that you never gave me one bit of information to-night. I've got good news for you, colonel, old boy—*the war's over!*"

K-6 slapped the German on the shoulder affectionately. As the astounded colonel blinked his eyes, the American went on, "The chief just wired me—it's a cinch for an armistice to-morrow morning, and the little old war is over. They told me they'd blow up two dumps to-night and no more, so I didn't bother to give them the one you let me have. That's between us, colonel, as man to man in our particular line, and no one else is ever going to know.

"Well, colonel, I must be on my way. There's a lonely spot a short way from here, and the boys are sending a plane there to pick me up to-morrow, just the minute the armistice goes into effect. It will take me the rest of the night, going through the woods, to get there, so I must be going. Glad to have met you, colonel—maybe we'll meet again in the next war."

So saying, he grasped the bound hands of the German in a farewell, replaced his cap and coat, and started for the stairs. At the door he stopped and turned about. "Your Headquarters will be here to release you at sunrise, colonel. I gave the orders to the boys over the wireless—they'll signal over to your lines in a few hours. Sorry to make you wait, but I've got to meet that plane, and I can't take any chances. When you get home, give my regards to the Kaiser. I'll be in Paris to-morrow night, and it's a Turkish bath for me."

Standing at attention, he brought his hand up to salute, turned, raced down the stairs, and slipped out into the black of the night. The "Rat" had vanished again.

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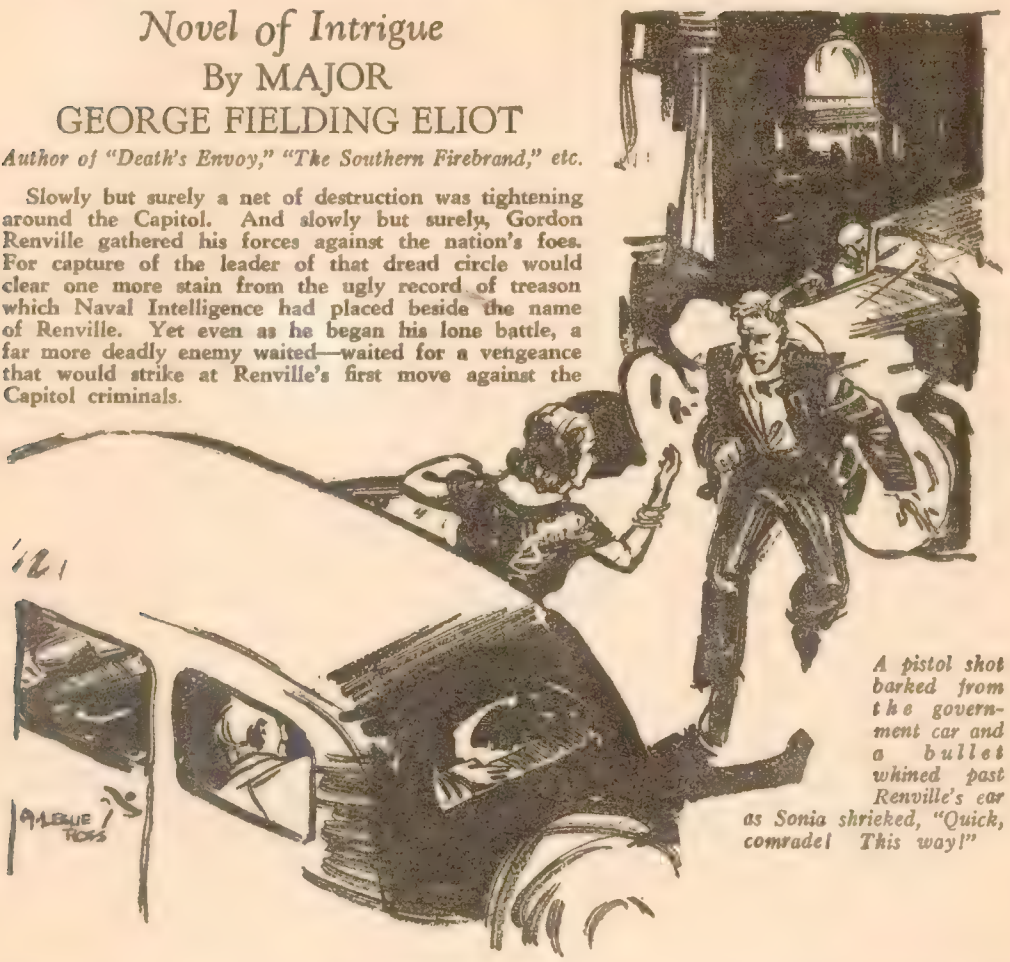

A pistol shot barked from the government car and a bullet whined past Renville's ear as Sonia shrieked, "Quick, comrade! This way!"

GORDON RENVILLE leaned back in his swivel chair and glanced across at the desk where his red-haired secretary, Sally Starr, sat busily typing.

"They're getting upset about the Argus letters," he remarked, without a trace of a smile.

Sally stopped typing. "It's because you don't send them direct," she conjectured. "The Department of Justice doesn't like to get all its good tips through Naval Intelligence. Keeps 'em from hogging the credit."

Renville nodded. "Yes, but I can't help doing things that way," he said. "The Navy's my service—" he swallowed hard—"even though—well, anyway, I'm afraid some jealous idiot might refuse to follow one of my tips if it wasn't that the Navy people know and will be asking questions if nothing's done. I've managed to rid the country of three dangerous spies in the last month, that way—and, of course, Klich, who was probably more dangerous than the others put together. But I'm still wondering why Klich was trying to get in touch with that gang at Red Hall before the immigration people bagged him. It worries me, that point. Klich is a fanatical anarchist. To him, a communist is only one degree removed from a hard-boiled reactionary."

"What does it matter? He's at Ellis Island, on his way back to Europe by now." Sally shrugged.

"Klich," Renville went on slowly, "is something more than an anarchist, too. He is one of the best research chemists in Europe—a specialist in high explosives. I found out all about that gentleman during my years abroad. I put him on my special black list. And here he turns up in Washington—just when our foreign affairs are approaching a crisis, too. I don't like it, Sally."

"You settled Mr. Klich's hash for him," Sally said admiringly.

"Yes, I got him deported. But the D.J. didn't see fit to go into the Red Hall angle of his activities, as far as I can find out. And of course the Navy's not authorized to undertake such work. I'm still worried. Think I'll take a run downtown—" He broke off.

In a cabinet on the wall of the long room, a buzzer shrilled—one short buzz, two long, one short.

"That's Peter, in New York," muttered Sally, as she threw a small switch and swung across to Renville one of the several telephones attached to the desk. She listened tensely as he spoke.

"Renville speaking. Saratoga," said Renville, giving the code-word for the day. The word was changed each night at midnight by radio, and without it, no communications could pass as authentic between himself and his farflung corps of agents. Anxiously, Sally watched his face. Some instinct told her that this was no routine call. Renville listened for a moment in grim silence, his mouth tightening.

"Can you pick up the trail?" he asked, at last. "Very well. Keep a watch on the usual places. But you won't find him. He's headed this way."

He hung up. In the depths of his steel-gray eyes, little points of fire were burning.

"Klich's escaped," he snapped. "Got away from Ellis Island in a fog—swimming. Somebody heard the hum of a seaplane's motor—and that's the only clue."

"A seaplane! Then he had help from the outside."

"Of course. Who'd want to help an anarchist get away? There's no anarchist organization to speak of in this country any more. It's either his Red pals—which seems damned unlikely—or there's something else behind it all. I've got to find out. But first I'll see that his escape isn't overlooked here. Take an Argus letter."

SALLY opened a drawer and produced a piece of absolutely plain paper, without even a water-mark.

Slipping it into her machine, she typed as Renville dictated:

"Bureau of Naval Intelligence:
Anarchist Klich has escaped from Ellis Island, assisted by confederates in seaplane. Suggest careful watch on communist group now making headquarters at so-called Red Hall on lower Pennsylvania Avenue. Klich is dangerous anarchist and expert in high explosives.

ARGUS.
His mark."

Renville pressed his right thumb on an ink-pad and set his thumb-print before the words, "His mark." There might come a day when it would be all-important to him to prove who had sent the Argus letters which had conveyed, of late, so much valuable information to government officers.

Sally addressed a plain envelope, affixing a special delivery stamp.

"You don't really think those communists are plotting anything desperate, do you?" Sally asked as she sealed the envelope. "It seems too silly."

"Whatever Klich is mixed up in isn't silly, it's deadly," Renville replied, rising to his feet and reaching for the letter. "As for the Red Hall outfit, the Communist Party leaders are screaming denials that they have anything to do with those fellows. Maybe they're lying, maybe not. I'm going downtown to find out—if I can. I'll take the letter along and mail it on my way."

"Take care of yourself!" warned Sally. She tried to speak lightly, with a smile.

But there was a gleam in the depth of her warm brown eyes which betrayed her —or would have, if Renville had been more observant of such details.

But he thought of nothing save his aim in life, the great mission to which he had dedicated himself, the mission which comprised two herculean tasks. The first was the stamping out of the spy-menace which threatened his country from a hundred unexpected sources. The second was his own rehabilitation, his restoration to the place of honor which a human bit of folly in the moonlight, in the aura of a lovely woman's fascination, had lost him.

For six years—an outcast, lost to family and friends—Gordon Renville had worked to fit himself for that mission. He had become a man of steel, dead to emotion, to human feeling. He thought only of his task. To accomplish it, he had built up about himself an organization for which his considerable private income had been used, an organization of spy hunters which could and would do what the government agents, hands tied by tradition and red tape, could not. The Argus letters were only one aspect of that organization's work. Day and night, from one end of America to the other, Renville's men were on watch, guided by the almost uncanny knowledge and intuition of their chief.

And so it was not for Gordon Renville to think of any woman, save as an enemy or a useful tool, till his work was done. Knowing this, Sally Starr sighed and turned back to her typing as the door closed behind him. He'd come back. He had to come back.

Her fingers hammered the typewriter with fierce intensity. . . .

At a branch post office on Rhode Island Avenue, Renville drew his big roadster to the curb and jumped out. He strode into the building and dropped the Argus letter into the special delivery slot. He was at the door again when he felt a touch on his shoulder.

Turning, he faced a burly, heavy-jowled man in a gray suit, with a spare, dapper young fellow just behind him.

"I'm Brady, Post Office Inspector," said the burly one. "Just step inside a minute, will you, mister?"

He flipped a badge into sight for a fraction of a second as he spoke, and jerked a significant thumb toward a door marked "Private."

"What for?" asked Renville coldly. "Am I under arrest?"

The post office inspector was used to hard-boiled customers, but he shrank visibly as he encountered the chilled-steel glare of Renville's eyes.

"Not at all," he said hastily. "I—uh —we just wanted—"

"I'm from the Department of Justice," cut in the younger man. "I think you just mailed a letter addressed to the Director of Naval Intelligence in the special delivery slot there, didn't you?"

"Whether I did or not," Renville murmured, "if you are government employees, you will certainly recognize the extreme inadvisability of interfering with the correspondence of the Bureau of Naval Intelligence—or of becoming too inquisitive about it."

"We had no intention of interfering. We just wanted to make certain inquiries," the D.J. man said.

"I would suggest," Renville said bitingly, "that you direct your inquiries through the proper official channels to the Navy Department. Just now, I can't give you gentlemen any more of my time, which is valuable. Good day."

"Now, see here, my friend," the young D.J. man said angrily. "We don't propose to stand for any more—"

BUT Renville had turned on his heel and was walking across the sidewalk to his car, leaving the two detectives sputtering but helpless. There was really nothing they could do—except take down his license number and start dogging his footsteps.

It would be an almost impossible job to trace that Maryland license through the maze of the dummy corporation in whose name it had been issued, Renville reflected grimly, as he drove cityward. He'd been a fool to mail those Argus let-

ters always at the same post office, special delivery. He might have foreseen that official curiosity and perhaps official jealousy would get the better of official discretion.

Renville was at some pains to make sure he wasn't being trailed before he headed into the driveway of a small house in the southeast section of the city. This was his city headquarters. It was a place of various advantages, including an exit on a side street, from which Renville presently came forth.

He was dressed in rough clothes, and his whole aspect had been deftly changed into that of a laborer out of work and rather down on his luck. Renville had been well trained in the art of disguise. He never indulged in such feeble theatricals as false beards. He knew well how to alter the expression of his features; how such details as a cap pulled down over one eye, axle grease under the fingernails and a slouching walk can transform a man almost beyond recognition.

Swinging aboard a trolley on the avenue, Renville passed under the very eye of a naval officer who had served with him in the old, dead days. The man gave him no more than a casual and rather contemptuous glance, without a gleam of recognition. Renville was not particularly elated; he was accustomed to success in his disguises.

He dropped from the car after passing the Capitol, and, dodging through the traffic, entered the dingy lobby of an ancient hotel. He was perfectly aware that, from behind their newspapers, two of the several loungers in the cane-bottomed rockers were watching him narrowly.

He went up to the desk and addressed himself to the swarthy youth who presided behind it.

"Is there a guy named Bodsky here?" he wanted to know.

"Bodsky?" repeated the clerk, slowly, studying this newcomer with beady-eyed suspicion.

"Yeah. Bodsky—Bill Bodsky. Him an' me usta be Wobblies together out in Seattle. Tell'm Sam Parsons is here."

The clerk had lifted a hand. "Not so loud," he begged. "Ya never know who's listenin'. Ya say you'n him were in the I. W. W. Got yer card yet?"

Renville produced a perfectly authentic membership card in the I. W. W.

The clerk glanced at it and nodded. "Upstairs," he muttered. "Room 401. You'll hafta walk—the elevator ain't runnin'."

Behind the door of Room 401 sounded a loud, ranting voice, underlaid by a hum of others.

Renville tried the door, found it locked, knocked. It was promptly opened—about an inch—and at the bearded face in the crack Renville thrust his I. W. W. card. The crack widened.

"Come in, comrade," he was invited.

The room was a very large one, and had probably been a hall, or sample room, in the pristine days of the hotel. On a platform at one end, a long-haired young man was making a communist address of the usual order. Few of the crowd in the hall were paying any attention. They were gathered in little groups, talking among themselves. The walls of the place were hung with Soviet flags and the insignia of the hammer and sickle. A door at the back of the platform and another at the farther end of the room gave easy egress in case of need. So much Renville noted immediately.

He had never been in the Red Hall before, though his agents had. He had been little interested in such matters—until the coming of Klich into the picture.

The man who had admitted him was turning away without asking further questions, leaving him to his own devices. Funny, that, if there was anything very wrong going on. They were not so careless as they seemed, though, these gentlemen of the Red Hall.

A pale-faced, fat man bustled up to Renville. "You looking for me? Bill Bodsky?" he asked, his eyes searching Renville's face.

"I'm looking for Bill Bodsky, yes," Renville answered—having an excellent description of that gentleman to go on.

"But, my friend, you aren't Bodsky!"

The fat man shrugged. "No offense," he grumbled. "Bill ain't here, and I was just sorta checkin' up. Guess you're all right, comrade. What's yer name?"

"I answer to the monnicker of Sam Parsons," Renville replied.

"Awright, Parsons. Take a walk around and meet some of the boys. I'll be seein' yuh—whassat?" The bearded doorman was plucking him by the elbow, whispering in his ear.

"Okay," he went on. "See yuh later," he flung at Renville, and hurried away, following the bearded one. The two disappeared through the door behind the platform.

RENVILLE looked about him. The crowd was about the same as could be found at any communist gathering. It was not a very dangerous group—unemployed workmen for the most part, with a sprinkling of students out for a thrill, and a number of other halfbaked minds. Certainly this was not material which the wary and tigerish Klich would find useful.

Yet there could be no doubt that Klich's first act on arriving in Washington had been to come straight here. He'd thrown off his Government "tail"—but not Renville's. Renville knew that Klich's escape had been engineered for the sole purpose of bringing him back here again. But why? It was for the answer to that question that Renville was now in the Red Hall.

Harmless as the place seemed, it was not harmless. There was something behind all this. Renville moved slowly through the groups of talking men, ears and eyes open. He heard nothing but the usual eyewash.

He came to the platform, where the long-haired young man still raved of the excellencies of the Soviet life. Close to the platform were some who were paying attention. Renville skirted this group, reached the end of the platform, stepped up on it among a group of other men very much like himself in general appearance. Now he was but a yard or so from the door through which the fat man had disappeared. Quite casually, as though he had no particular purpose in life, he slouched to the door and laid his hand on the knob.

"Hey, you! Where you think you're goin'?" demanded a shrill voice.

Renville turned around. The speaker was a woman, a dark-haired, rather pretty girl in a cheap print dress. Her arms were folded as she stood there beside the lecturer, staring at Renville—and Renville was sure that under the flimsy cape of her dress, one of her hands held a gun.

"I'm just lookin' for Bill Bodsky," he answered easily. "I gave my name downstairs."

"Bodsky's not there," the girl snapped. "Who are you, anyway?"

The lecturer had stopped talking. Every eye in the hall had turned on Renville and the girl. Instinct—the instinct which never failed him—warned him that his life hung by a thread.

"I'm just a wobbly from the coast. Friend o' Bodsky's." He shrugged.

"Yeah? Where'd you know Bodsky?"

"In Seattle."

"Yeah? I was with Bill in Seattle, and I never saw you. I think you're a cop!" flashed the girl—who, it seemed, had instincts of her own.

"A cop! A spy!" yelled a dozen voices. Faces which had shown only vacuous curiosity turned ugly at those words. The crowd surged forward in a mass toward the platform.

Renville knew he could never shoot his way out, and even if he could, that would not serve his higher ends.

But in that surging crowd he saw a face he knew. It was the face of a man who had been a machinist's mate at Pensacola, long ago. A bad-conduct discharge had rid the Navy of a disloyal petty officer—but that didn't matter now. The man would be useful.

"Wait!" cried Renville, his whole manner changing, all the huskiness vanishing from his speech. "I'm no cop! Stand back and listen, you fools! I'm here to help you—to be one of you. You think

you have your grievances—wait till you hear mine!"

He pointed out through the dingy window to the gleaming dome of the Capitol at the end of the avenue.

"You think you hate that dome and all it stands for!" he cried. "Your hate is a little thing beside mine! Why, if I had a ton of dynamite underneath that building, all I'd ask is the chance to light the fuse before they got me!"

"What's that you say?" The girl had gone deadly white, and her eyes glittered like a snake's in a face from which every drop of blood had drained.

"I'M Gordon Renville!" Renville shouted. "I was an officer in the Navy, once! They kicked me out—for what? Because I talked a little too much to a pretty girl. That's all. They kicked me into the gutter! My family spits on me! Men I used to mess with pass me in the street with heads turned the other way—don't see me. I'm Renville, scum, gutter-scrapings! By God, I'll show them some day! That's why I'm here, comrades!

"And there—" his finger shot out, stabbing straight at the gaping ex-sailor —"is a man who knows that I speak the truth. Come up here, Johnson. Closer! You were at Pensacola when they kicked me out of the Navy! You remember me, don't you? Lieutenant Renville I was, then, in the Experimental School—and you were a machinist's mate, second class."

Instinctively, as he met Renville's compelling gaze, Johnson's heels had come together, his hand started to rise in salute.

"Aye, aye, sir—I mean, dammit, yes! I remember you all right," his voice growled out. And a yell went up from the others—the yell with which wolves welcome a new addition to the pack.

Renville held up his hand.

"Now you know! I don't want to talk about it—but you know!" Renville shouted. "You know why I hate the United States Government!"

A roar of acclaim shook the windows of that room, a roar which was a deafening thunder of brutish applause.

The girl in the print dress had moved closer to Renville. "Comrade," she said, amid the clamor and excited talk, "I think you had better come with me. There will be others who will wish to speak with you."

It was the opening Renville had been praying for. "I'll come gladly, if you wish—and if I can be of any service," he murmured.

"I think you can be of great service to the Cause," the girl answered, eying him oddly. "Or else—but come this way."

Her hand on his elbow urged him toward the door as several of the men on the platform gathered round him to pat him on the shoulder and mouth their words of a maudlin comradeship into his ear, half stifling him with the aromas of bad whiskey and garlic the while.

She knocked at the door with a peculiar staccato rhythm, and after a moment's wait, the fat man opened it.

"What do you want, Sonia?" he demanded.

Beyond him, Renville could see three or four other figures in the dimly lighted room. One was the bearded fellow who had admitted him to the hall; another was a woman—he could not see her face. A third was certainly the dead-white, sleepy-looking Klich—master of explosives, enemy of all government, of civilization itself! There was still another man, over in the corner, and at sight of him Renville's heart jumped.

The girl was talking swiftly to the bearded man in Russian. Doubtless she thought Renville wouldn't understand; but he did know the language, and he caught the phrases, "He spoke of dynamite. . . . under the Capitol. . . . We must. . . ."

In just a moment, Renville would be taken into the inner room.

Just as the door was opening, a whistle shrilled at the far end of the room—once, then again. Heavy feet came clumping down the hall, and a peremptory knock thundered on the outer door.

Instantly, the bearded man slammed

his door in Sonia's face. Renville heard two bolts click home.

"Open up here!" roared a muffled voice in the corridor.

The Red Hall was in turmoil. Some of the occupants were rushing at the little exit at the other end of the hall, but now it was flung open and uniformed police began crowding into the room.

"Get me out of this!" Renville begged Sonia. He himself saw no way of escape, unless there was a secret exit somewhere.

"I'd rather kill you!" Sonia flashed, her eyes hot pools of hatred. "This is your work!" Her fingers bit into his arm with the savagery of a tigress.

The police and some plainclothesmen were herding the mob in the hall away from the exits. A little party of men in civilian clothes were shoving through the crowd, as a motorboat might cleave through a troubled sea, heading for the platform.

"There he is!" cried a voice. "That's the man!"

The eyes of the speaker were on Renville, sharp eyes gleaming through the lenses of a pince-nez. It was the earnest young D. J. agent who had spoken to Renville in the post office.

"FOR God's sake, isn't there any other door?" Renville asked of the girl. Sonia's mobile expression had flashed from hostility to strained query.

But if she had contemplated helping Renville to escape, she was too late.

The agents had broken through the crowd and leaped upon the platform. Two of them seized Renville, and the young man in the pince-nez confronted him, panting with triumph.

"Smart guy, eh?" he gloated. "Mister Gordon Renville, late of the Navy. So you hate the United States, do you? Boys, this is the most dangerous man in Washington! Ex-naval officer, turned Red. We'll ask him a few questions."

"If you'd just arrived ten seconds later!" Renville thought despairingly. The blundering fools! In another ten seconds Renville would have been through that door. It would have closed behind him, and he would have been involved in the schemes of the inner circle. He would have had a chance to learn what Klich—and the others—were doing here. But now. . . .

Even the D. J. man shrank away from the glare in Renville's eyes. "Hang on to him, boys! Search him," he said nervously. "You others break in that door."

They broke it in, but found nothing but an ordinary hotel room, with another door opening on a corridor convenient to the fire exit. Of course. What did they expect, Renville thought bitterly.

"This guy had a gun on him," one of Renville's captors announced.

"All right. Bring him along. Turn the others loose. This is the bird I was after. Lucky I moved quick. He'd have been out that door and away in another minute." The young agent was much pleased with himself.

Renville saw then that the girl Sonia had disappeared. He couldn't see her anywhere in the crowded Red Hall—so there was a hidden exit, somewhere.

He was sorry he'd had to announce his name to all these Reds, but he'd had no choice. It had been that, or the fate of a spy. The men behind this plot would stop at nothing. If only the newspapers didn't get hold of it—but they wouldn't. The Red's wouldn't talk. And the D. J. people wouldn't want to advertise the Argus letters.

Renville was led downstairs and out through a side entrance into a waiting car.

"Thought you were smart, didn't you?" chuckled the D. J. agent. "Mister, I went right with the special delivery boy to the Navy Department. They showed me the letter, and I realized right away that you were up to some dirty work in connection with Red Hall—trying to pull a herring across the trail. Your disguise didn't fool me because I was on the watch for build and coloring. I picked you up as you came into the hotel. Sedition, Mister, is a serious offense—as you'll find out!"

Renville could have choked him for a

garrulous, overzealous idiot. Yet the man was justified in doing his duty as he saw it.

"You might as well come clean," insisted the agent as the car bowled along toward the Department of Justice building. "What's behind those Argus letters? What's the idea? Who're you covering up?"

"You would think that," Renville said bitterly.

His scheme for netting the small fry of the spy world had backfired on him with a vengeance. If only he'd laid off, this last time, until he'd investigated for himself, things might have been different.

Well, when they brought him before somebody in authority, he'd tell what he knew. If they believed him, they might still be in time to nip in the bud whatever devilish scheme was in course of preparation. If not—a feeling of helplessness oppressed him. And Gordon Renville was not used to feeling helpless.

The car swung around a corner. The two agents between whom Renville sat shifted against the lurch of the vehicle—and Renville drove his fist suddenly into the face of the one on his left, grabbed the door handle, and threw himself outward.

The agent in charge, who was opposite Renville on a folding seat, tried to twist round and seize him, but in the cramped interior of the car, he failed. Renville hit the street—ran a step or two, and went to his knees with the force of the impact. Brakes screamed as the car skidded to a stop.

A pistol shot barked from the window, and the bullet whisked past his ear as he picked himself up. Another car came roaring up beside the Government car, forcing the latter to the curb, blocking the fire of the agents.

Its door swung open.

"Quick!" shrieked the girl Sonia. "I'm here, comrade!"

THE government car crashed into a lamp post. Renville, half-running, half-staggering, gained the door of the other car, and hands dragged him inside. The car gathered speed, and was followed by a spatter of bullets which thudded helplessly on its armored back.

The rescuing car made the next corner on two wheels and whirled away down a long and almost empty street. Behind it, very far away, a police whistle shrilled—and faded.

The bearded man and the fat pale one were in the car with Sonia. A younger man in plain livery was driving.

"Nice work, Sonia," Renville panted. "Thanks."

"We were following. But you freed yourself. I don't know what we could have done if you hadn't tried," Sonia told him. "You saw us?"

"No. But I knew that once the barred doors closed on me—" He shrugged the rest, and Sonia nodded.

"Me, I have also been in jail," she said rather proudly. "I know."

"Where are you taking me?" Renville asked.

"Back to the Red Hall. It is the last place they will look," Sonia replied with an impish grin. "We have other rooms in that hotel. It is a useful headquarters, no?"

The car now turned abruptly into a narrow alley. At the other end of the alley, a taxicab was waiting. The chauffeur got out and busied himself with changing his license plates. The two men and Sonia closed around Renville, escorted him to the taxi. The pale fat man didn't get in.

"They'll be looking for three men and a girl," he explained. "I'll help Victor get the car under cover. Good luck, comrades."

The taxi turned back toward the Red Hall, passing on the way a hurrying police car and a couple of motorcycle men. The net was being thrown out, but it would not catch Renville again. That much he promised himself. That the agents were looking for him by his real name did not matter. No one knew where he lived, no one but his own people. Not one bit of property, not one automobile was registered in the name

of Gordon Renville. He would be hard to find. And, given time, he'd show them their mistake.

His spirits rose with every turn of the taxi's wheels—the taxi that was bearing him back into the heart of the sinister intrigue that centered about Red Hall.

The car didn't drive up to the Pennsylvania Avenue entrance of the old hotel. It stopped, instead, before a small, dingy restaurant on the next street. Sonia preceded Renville, and the bearded man brought up behind him. Renville was beginning to feel that he was still under guard.

Sonia led the way right through the restaurant into a musty, dark corridor, down a flight of steps, through the depths of a noisome cellar, and to a heavy, icebox door. The door opened into a large refrigerating room where a few scraggly sides of beef hung on hooks. Carefully closing the thick door behind her, Sonia pulled down on an empty hook, and a sliding door in the rear wall slipped back in well-oiled grooves, revealing a narrow passageway.

"Observe," chuckled Sonia. "The back door to our headquarters."

The door closed behind them, and the three went down that passage lighted by the ray of Sonia's little pocket torch. Another sliding door opened to reveal an elevator—so small that only one person could enter at a time.

"We had to put it in the dumb-waiter shaft," Sonia explained. "To have installed a new elevator would certainly have aroused suspicion. After you, comrade." She nodded to the bearded man.

He glanced at Renville. "Is it safe?" he asked, patting a pocket which probably contained a gun.

"Go on, fool," Sonia snapped. The man obeyed without more words. He pressed a button in the elevator; the door closed on him, and the line of light within glided up the crack and disappeared.

Sonia laid a hand on Renville's arm. "It was I who begged them to follow you, comrade," she said softly. "I was sorry I thought you a spy."

There was a new light in her eyes—love had come to her swiftly, unbidden. Her reason for sending the other man on ahead was so obvious that Renville almost laughed aloud. Then, suddenly, he felt a little sorry for this ignorant girl whose lonely, reckless spirit had so suddenly fixed its headlong loyalty to him. But he did not bend over to kiss her.

"I have my duty to think of now, Sonia," he said gently. "My duty to myself, to my vengeance. If there are those above who will help me—"

He left the sentence effectively unfinished, impressively vague.

"They will help you! Yes!" Sonia whispered. "And then we—" She broke off, with sudden shyness as the elevator slid down and the door opened. "Go in," Sonia ordered, with a gesture of impatience at the interruption. "Press the button marked 3. I will follow."

THE tiny elevator bore Renville silently upward into the hotel. It was the hotel, of course. He'd counted paces in the tunnel and was sure of that.

When the thing stopped, a door slid open in front of him. Renville stepped out into a rather dim room, through whose curtained windows the afternoon sunlight filtered unevenly.

Two men were in the room. One stood by the windows, his face in shadow; the other sprawled in a worn armchair.

The one in the armchair was deathly pale. His eyes, hooded as always by half-lowered lids, were dead, opaque, like the eyes of a reptile. His features were Grecian, perfect as though chiseled in white marble. In his lap, his long, white fingers twisted and writhed with never-ending nervousness.

He was Klich, the anarchist and dynamiter whose description was in the secret files of every police bureau in Europe. Klich—who had slain a Bulgarian premier with his own hands, and whom the Sûrété General believed knew more than any other living man about the assassination of King Alexander of Yugoslavia.

The other man was a short, dapper, well-dressed person with a smooth olive

complexion and a short mustache. His eyes and cheek bones had just the hint of an Oriental configuration; but his English was purely Oxonian as he addressed Renville in his purring drawl.

"My friends brought you along, I see, Mr. Renville. I am rejoiced to see you safely delivered out of the hands of the enemy."

"I am glad to be here," said Renville honestly. "I think you have the advantage of me, Mr.—"

"Winter," said the other, moving forward a little as though to inspect Renville more closely. He made no attempt to introduce Klich, who sat silent, watching the others from beneath those pale eyelids.

"Mr. Renville," said Winter, "I have heard of the address you made to the comrades in Red Hall. Admirable words, Mr. Renville. The question is—are they merely words, or would you transform them into acts, if you were given the opportunity?"

"Give me the opportunity," Renville invited. He put sincere simplicity into his tone.

Winter nodded with evident satisfaction. "Good," he said. "You shall have it. Be seated, and permit me to explain." He gestured toward another armchair.

Renville moved toward it, and at that moment the elevator door reopened, and Sonia came into the room.

Winter ignored her, continuing his talk with Renville. "Tomorrow," said he, "as perhaps you know, the President of the United States is to deliver in person a message to congress, on foreign affairs. We have obtained advance information of the contents of that message. Among other things of less importance, the President intends to announce the complete severance of diplomatic relations with the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. And he intends to give his reasons for so doing in such forceful and vigorous language that we, who are the friends of the Soviet and of mankind, have made up our minds not to permit his words to reach the millions of listening Americans."

Winter's voice took on a sharper edge. "Instead," he announced, "we have arranged to cut off his microphone, and to connect with the wires of the broadcasting companies a microphone of our own, through which one of our comrades, whose voice can perfectly imitate that of the President, will give out a message of exactly contrary tenor. This will not only prevent the American people from hearing an unjust denunciation of the Soviets by the President, but will also create a situation of such confusion and uncertainty that it may be impossible for the President to actually carry out his intention. I am sure you will agree with me, Mr. Renville, that the capitalist America which you hate—not the real America of the workers—will suffer a severe setback if this plan is successful."

"It is an excellent plan," Renville said with just the proper shade of doubt in his voice. His brain was in a turmoil, but he controlled his outward conduct perfectly.

"The technical part of it," Winter explained, "has been perfected by this gentleman." He waved a careless hand toward Klich, who gave no sign save the eternal restless writhing of his hands. "We have found certain employees of the broadcasting companies who were not impervious to the rustle of crisp new banknotes. That part of the arrangement is ready. We will broadcast from here. But there is one hitch—one little hitch, which may ruin our whole plan."

He paused, his eyes fixed on Renville. "It is to eradicate that hitch, Mr. Renville, that you may serve us, and wreak your vengeance against the capitalist minions who have so oppressed you!"

A LITTLE too flamboyant, that speech, Renville's critical mind reflected. He raised his eyes in apparent eagerness as Winter moved a step or two closer, lowering his voice to give the effect of one imparting a priceless secret.

"We had intended," he explained, "to select our moment for switching in our microphone by listening to the beginning of the President's address. He usually

begins with the words, 'Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, gentlemen of the Congress—' and we could cut in right there. But the electrical apparatus of our friend here—" again the gesture toward Klich—"is so powerful that we can't get any reception on our radio. Fortunately, this hotel commands a clear view of the Capitol. We require some one to give us a visual signal at the moment when the President rises to address the assembled Houses."

Winter waited a moment for that to sink in, then went on. "This can be done from one of the windows of the gallery of the House of Representatives. The exact window must be decided on. The signal itself can be very simple, such as the movement of a white handkerchief across the pane. We have high-powered field glasses. Will you undertake this duty for us, Mr. Renville?"

"It would give me pleasure to be of service," Renville said, with the gleam of the fanatic in his widened eyes. "But why me, rather than another?"

"Because you can wear the uniform of a naval officer, and thus pass without other credentials into the gallery. We could send one of our own men in such a uniform, but he would betray himself if stopped or questioned. You will not. You will know how to reply to anyone you may meet, even another officer."

"Unless I encounter my friends of the Department of Justice," Renville pointed out.

"They will not be looking for you in the uniform of the Navy," Winter explained. "Come, we shall drink to success. Bring wine, Sonia."

The girl glided into another room, and returned very promptly with a tray, bearing a bottle and glasses. Winter poured for himself, Klich and Renville. Sonia, he ignored. Dramatically, he shoved a glass into Renville's hand. His eyes were triumphant.

"To the Cause!" he cried, lifting his glass so that the light sparkled through the crimson wine. He drained it at a gulp.

Renville did likewise. Klich sipped, set the glass down, and resumed his finger-twiddling.

Renville noted the girl's great, burning eyes upon him. In them was a pleading expression which he could not read. Yet somehow it seemed a warning.

"You will stay with us until tomorrow morning, Mister Renville," Winter added. "Until tomorrow. Then we will provide you with a uniform, and you may perform your part in the great plan. Yes. Tomorrow. A most appropriate day for our purpose, Renville."

He chuckled. The light in the room was growing dim in Renville's eyes. The chuckle seemed to come from very far away.

"You will sleep now, Renville," Winter murmured. "Sleep — until you are needed."

Winter's eyes seemed to be growing brighter and brighter. Their Oriental slant grew more accentuated. They were mere slits of fire now, and dimly Renville knew he was being subjected to a very rare and very powerful hypnotic influence. He struggled against it, but the drugged wine had weakened his reserves of resistance. He felt his brain reeling under the shock of battle with the power that assailed it.

"Sleep—and remember to obey," intoned Winter.

Renville closed his eyes, but not in sleep. It was a conscious act, the dropping of the curtain between his brain and the deadly concentration of Winter's hypnosis. His sensation of falling into a fiery pit gradually left him. He felt a little stronger, his mind a little clearer; and he realized that he must feign sleep.

The drug had not overpowered him. Why? He could not understand that. There was an answer somewhere, but he must not grope for it now. He must concentrate all his mental effort on keeping up the deception. He must appear deeply asleep. He let his head roll to one side, his muscles relax.

"He will do," he heard Winter say. "And when he wakes, he will have no thought save to obey my orders. You have done well, Sonia."

"Yes. Of course I have done well," said Sonia, in the tone of a complacent child.

A dull sort of understanding began to seep into Renville's brain. She had drugged him, of course. She had not dared to omit the drug altogether, lest he show no effects. But she had not given him enough to put him completely under. Why? In doing this, she was risking her life for him. That she risked her life, Renville was very sure. Klich, and those associated with Klich, would have but one penalty for the least betrayal.

Renville's sluggish mind struggled with this problem. There was something else he ought to be thinking about, too, but he couldn't. The others kept on talking—talking. He must listen.

They were muttering, Klich and Winter, in a tongue unknown to Renville. He was master of half a dozen of the more important languages, and had a smattering of several others, but this clicking, guttural talk was unfamiliar. It was Slavic, he thought; perhaps Serbian or Czech. The reason for their use of it was immediately to become apparent. An impatient sound came from Sonia.

"Talk English, or Russian!" demanded the girl angrily. "Am I a baby, to be left in the dark?"

"There are things it is better not to burden your clever mind with, Sonia," Winter answered soothingly. "We need you, and I do not want you confused with too many details. Call Ivan and Bodsky, will you, and have them carry Renville into the next room. He'll sleep through the night, and in the morning—well, he'll have his work to do. What a vengeance! You women are devils, Sonia."

"What do you mean?" asked Sonia in sharp, quick tones.

"Never mind. Get the boys and remove your sleeping prince."

THE "sleeping prince" presently heard the tramp of footsteps, and felt himself lifted from his chair. He was careful to leave each muscle utterly relaxed. He knew sharp eyes were upon him, that the least movement would betray his consciousness.

He was half carried, half dragged into another room. He heard a door close, heard the men puffing as they dragged him on. Thump! He was thrown on a hard couch.

"You stay and guard him, Bodsky. You're his pal," a rough voice growled.

"Pal, hell! Never saw him before," complained Bodsky. "Least, not as far's I know. That's a real wobbly card he had, though. All right, I'll watch 'im."

The other man stamped out. Bodsky whistled tunelessly. He scratched a match, and the odor of burning tobacco came to Renville's nostrils. His head was clearing a little. He had to think, had to. But he knew better than to try too hard. Let the mental process come naturally. That would be better.

He must begin at the beginning. Winter had said that the President's message was to be against the Soviet. But that was all wrong. All wrong. Renville was not without his source of information, even in the sacred precincts of the State Department. He had had assurance from those sources that the President was going to announce to congress the complete and satisfactory adjustment, by long and patient negotiations, of the Russian loan question, and the beginning of closer diplomatic and commercial relations with the Soviets.

At the same time, so Renville's informant had said, mention was to be made of Soviet participation in a new international loan to China. The other countries involved in this loan were the United States, Great Britain and France. What this amounted to, as Renville well knew, was a direct command to Japan, which said, "Hands off China!" Would Japan defy the combined powers?

She might, were it not for her Achilles' heel—the Russian war-port of Vladivostok, with its submarines and aircraft within easy striking distance of the Japanese mainland. Alone, Russia might be unable to deal with Japan. But as an ally of the powers, the Soviets peculiar strategical position made her assistance

invaluable. All this Renville understood very well indeed.

Was Winter misinformed as to the President's intentions? Renville rejected that idea instantly. Not Winter—or whatever his name was. Renville knew he had seen that slightly Oriental face before. He knew it for the face of a spy, though he could not at once identify it. Winter was too astute to be deceived by rumors. He knew; and the presence of Klich, the explosive expert and desperate anarchist, proved more to Renville than Winter had understood.

This business of a phoney broadcast Renville rejected also. There was a deeper, more sinister intent. Winter had said that to-morrow would be an appropriate day. To-morrow was the fifth of November. That meant nothing to Renville, at first. Nothing but a few state and municipal elections would be going on. Winter couldn't have meant that.

Then, suddenly, understanding came to Renville in a flash. November fifth was Guy Fawkes' day in England—the day of the discovery of the great Gunpowder Plot, by which conspirators had meant to destroy king and parliament at a blow.

And one of the principal conspirators in that plot had been a Thomas Winter—or Renville's memory of English history was sadly at fault! His eyes narrowed as he remembered Winter's peculiar smile. A man of a sinister, sardonic humor, this spy! Guy Fawkes' day, with an expert in explosives, a criminal expert, on the scene—it was a significant combination. The two taken together could mean but one thing—destruction!

Renville's first impulse was to fling himself suddenly on Bodsky, overpower the man, and make his escape. But sober second thought checked that impulse, as always with Gordon Renville since he had made self-discipline his first attainment.

Suppose he did escape. Suppose he went to the authorities with his vague suspicions. Who would believe him? They'd throw him in jail as a seditious criminal self-confessed by his escape from the D. J. agents. He must have proof, absolute, unimpeachable proof, or else he must stop this thing single-handed—or at least with no more aid than that of his own organization.

The thought of his own organization reminded him that his automatic check system was now working. He had been absent, without reporting, for considerably more than the allotted two hours. Sally Starr would have already started the search for him. The Red Hall would be under the observation of his men. They might even be in the building at that moment.

There was a standing order that Renville's unexplained absence for more than two hours was always to be followed by such action. He was not a man to walk blindly into a trap and then have nothing done about it. He lived on the brink of death, always, in his war with spies. But he meant to live as long as he could!

He ventured to lift an eyelid just a trifle. The man Bodsky—whose name, culled from memory of a week spent in a wobbly camp near Seattle, had procured Renville admittance to Red Hall—was standing near the window, smoking. The window itself was small, and barred with iron. The room was a dingy hall bedroom, furnished with no more than a narrow bed and a rickety washstand. There was not even a chair. The one door was closed.

No—it was opening, right now! A woman's bare arm appeared, swinging it back. A woman's voice spoke to Bodsky.

"The chief wants you, comrade. I will guard the prisoner."

Sonia? No, it was not Sonia. The woman who glided into the room with the sinuous ease of a serpent was Madeleine Faure, the woman spy who had brought about his downfall.

BODSKY nodded and went out, and Madeleine came across the room. Renville had closed his eyes again, but he could hear her light heels tapping on the floor, could smell the distinctive perfume which she always used.

Once again he was at the mercy of this beautiful spy-devil—the woman whose ambitious plans he had already, since his

great spy-quest began, brought to ruin once. No doubt she had planned her vengeance carefully, since that day.

She was very close to the bed, looking down at him.

"Gordon Renville!" she murmured, very low. "Gordon Renville! There you lie, helpless. I could drive this blade into your throat, but I have a better, sweeter vengeance! Yes, you shall give the signal for the great coup! You, with your own hands, shall destroy your country that you love so much, passing the love of women! If you could only know, my vengeance would be complete. That is what is lacking—that you shall not know it is Madeleine Faure who has brought you to this! But one cannot have everything. Sleep well, Gordon Renville. Sleep, and wake obedient to your master's will!"

"He's sleeping all right!" said another voice, the voice of Sonia, speaking from the doorway. She laughed gaily, a strained, high-pitched sound. "What a man the chief is! He knows how to deal with—"

"Silence, you little fool!" interrupted la Faure sharply. "Do you want some of these longears to hear you? You'll be blurting out the wrong words next, and then you know what will happen to you. If you like the idea of having red-hot needles thrust through your tongue, go ahead."

"You'd enjoy the job, wouldn't you, Madeleine?" Sonia said softly. "I'm sick of your high-and-mighty airs! You're not the chief, and you'll give me no orders! No—don't move! Drop that knife or I'll shoot you for the devil you are!" A note of hysteria had come into her voice as she saw the flash of la Faure's weapon so close to Renville's throat.

Steel tinkled on the wooden floor.

"Why, Sonia," Madeleine began in a tone that was almost caressingly soft.

"Kick it over this way!" interrupted Sonia.

A clatter attested that she was obeyed.

"Now get out of here!" Sonia ordered. "The chief wants you. He wants an explanation of why you sent Bodsky away from his post without orders."

"I have no explanations for anyone!" The softness abruptly left Madeleine's voice. "I am Madeleine Faure. I do as I please!" she retorted furiously. "I shall go now and tell him so to his face! He is no chief of mine!"

Her spike heels clicked viciously out of the room. Sonia slammed the door sharply after the woman. Then she spoke to Renville, softly and quickly:

"I have tried to save you. I have done all I can. I dare do no more." There was a slight catch in her voice as she looked down at him.

Renville opened his eyes. "Thank you, Sonia!" he said gratefully. "I don't know why—"

"Yes you do," she broke in stormily. "Why pretend? I love you—and I hate la Faure. I don't know what she has against you, but she means to do you some dreadful harm."

"We are old enemies, she and I," he said. "Now, quickly—for we haven't much time, I think. Where does the door lead? Into the room where I spoke to Winter?"

"No. Into a corridor. The staircase is at one end—to the right. But there is an armed guard there. You can't escape unless I get him out of the way."

"But if you do that—they'll find you out," he protested.

"Yes. But does that matter? You must go now—while you have the chance."

"Would you help me if you could, Sonia?" Renville asked softly, hating himself the while. Duty was sometimes a cruel taskmaster.

"Yes!" she whispered fiercely.

"Then," he requested, "go down into the lobby of the hotel. You will see strangers there. One or two, perhaps—young men. Say to any of them, 'It will be a night of stars.' If he answers, 'Stars in a field of blue,' tell him where I am, and go away. If not, try another till you find one who knows the answer."

"Who are you?" asked Sonia, wide-eyed. When he shook his head, the cold-

ness returning to his eyes, she said quickly, "But never mind. I am betraying my friends, my cause—but I will do it. For you."

Steps thudded in the hall.

She bent and kissed him with a child's passionate awkwardness, and was across the room at the window by the time Bodsky entered.

"All right, scram!" he said to Sonia. "Kid, you sure got the *madame* riled! Y'oughta hear her tellin' the boss off! Better stay outa her way till she cools down. She's campin' on your trail."

"I'll take a walk for a while. Thanks, Bill," Sonia said composedly, and departed without hurry.

Then began the longest period of waiting Renville had ever endured. Bodsky walked up and down for a while, perched on the end of the bed for a while, grumbled to himself about not being relieved. He wanted his supper. The room grew darker; the sun was setting.

Bodsky went to the door and called to somebody in the corridor.

"Hey, Ivan! When do we eat, for God's sake? Ask the boss if I stay here all night?"

There was an unintelligible answer. Presently the door opened again.

"I will watch," said a cold, almost inhuman voice. "Go to your food."

Renville dared not risk a fluttering eyelid, but he knew that that voice could belong only to the anarchist, Klich.

BODSKY went out, and another period of waiting followed. Then Renville heard Klich draw in his breath sharply, as though startled. Renville had heard nothing, but Klich had. He moved softly toward the door.

Renville listened with all his ears. He lifted his eyelids again. The room was almost dark. He could see Klich, hovering by the door; caught the dull gleam of a weapon.

"Bah," muttered Klich at length. "My ears play me tricks. This is America, not Europe. No need for alarm in this land of fools."

He turned back, nervously pacing across the room—and behind him, silently, the door swung open.

Dark figures slid into the room. An arm was thrown suddenly about Klich's neck, and a voice whispered sharply, "One yip out of you and I'll blow your spine in two! You here, boss?"

Renville was already on his feet, greeting his two young men. "Yes! Nice work, Jimmy! Thanks, Haydon. What about the guard outside?" he whispered.

"He's cold," Haydon answered. Jimmy was holding fast to Kilch, who stood frozen with astonishment and fear, the muzzle of an automatic jammed into the small of his back.

"Then let's go. Bring that animal along. Kill him if he makes a sound!" Renville ordered. "Got a spare gun, either of you? Thanks again." The rough grip of the automatic was comforting to his hand.

He stole into the corridor. There was a line of light under a door beyond, and a hum of voices came from behind it. But there was no one in sight—nothing save a dark mass on the floor a few feet away.

"Bring him along," Renville whispered. "Silence, now. Car outside?"

"Right in front. All set," Jimmy replied softly.

They urged the reluctant Klich into the corridor. He was obeying orders. He knew these men were not joking when they threatened death.

They went noiselessly down the stairs, and Klich contrived to stumble, hoping that the sound would be heard. But Renville caught him, and the anarchist dared not try again. They went down another set of stairs, under the dim glow of a yellow incandescent. The lobby was below. There were men there, reds, perhaps, but not the dangerous crew of Winter.

"Now, Klich! One false move and it's your last," warned Renville. "Walk straight out to the sidewalk. If you make the smallest sign, we'll shoot you in your tracks."

They went down that last staircase, and started across the lobby, the two

younger men close on either side of the prisoner, Renville right behind. Their guns weren't displayed, but they were ready. Klich walked as a man might walk the last mile to the chair. His dead-white face was set and bitter. He looked straight ahead.

They reached the sidewalk. There were people passing, a policeman strolled along. Suddenly Klich jerked away and started to run. Renville tripped him deftly. Jimmy and Haydon grabbed his arms and hurled him into a big black car that waited in front of the hotel.

"Hey!" said the cop sharply.

"Drunk!" explained Renville. "Wants to make trouble. We're taking him home."

The policeman looked doubtful, but Renville had hopped into the car, and the big machine glided off into the traffic before the man in blue had made up his mind.

Klich sank into the back seat between his captors. "Where are you taking me?" he asked in his cold voice.

"You'll find out," Renville informed him.

The glass panel by the driver's seat slid back.

"Have I done well?" asked the voice of Sonia.

"You here?" asked Renville, startled.

"Where else could I go?" Sonia asked simply.

"You she-cat!" grated Klich. "Your life will pay for your treason!"

"Shut up," ordered Renville.

RENVILLE paced his office nervously. "We've got to find out what's at the bottom of all this," he told Sally Starr. "Klich won't talk. He laughs at threats. I think he'd laugh at torture. I brought him along because I thought he might be the mainspring of the whole show, but he laughs and says his work is done, the others carry on without him. I also thought he might break under pressure, but I misjudged him. He won't. We've been at him all night. Even if we tortured him, he'd only lie. Until it was too late."

"There's no threat you can hold over him?" Sally suggested.

"No. Can't see— Wait! Wait—if he's the man I think he is— Yes, he'd fear that. We'll try."

Half an hour later, Renville was in a chill, concrete-lined room in the basement of his headquarters. Klich, manacled and defiant, faced his captor with hooded stare and smiled sardonically at Renville's demand for information.

"You'll k n o w to-morrow," Klich promised mockingly. "I've done my work well. I'll die, yes. But not till I have the satisfaction of knowing that I'm well avenged."

He had a full understanding of Renville's difficulties. He knew Renville had to have specific information in order to act. He was actually enjoying himself, carried away by his fanatical fervor.

"Very well," said Renville in a tone of steel. "If you want it that way, you can have it."

He stepped to the door and spoke. An officer in a blue-and-gold naval uniform came into the room.

At sight of Klich, the officer's eyes brightened into a feral glare. He sprang at the seated man, hands grappling for Klich's throat.

Renville dragged him back by main force. "Not now. Not that way, captain," he begged. "I haven't agreed to let you have him—yet."

Klich's eyes were staring at the gold badges on the officer's cap and collar. They were not the badges of the United States Navy. They seemed rather to represent a double-headed e a g l e, crowned, on a shield.

The officer was panting with excitement. "He ees de man!" he gasped out. "Ah, God—de very man!"

"Permit me to make you known, *Monsieur* Klich," said Renville softly, "to Captain Korvete Paschitch, naval attaché of the Royal Yugoslav Legation. Captain, if I give you this man, can you get him out of the country without any irritating formalities?"

"I can, indeed," said the other eagerly. "But geev him to me and I will prove

eet! A ship of my countree is even now at Norfolk! Ah, when we get heem to Belgrade, dere will be questionings. And he weel talk—scream for us!"

Klich spoke suddenly, in a quick, staccato stream of syllables. The officer answered, his tone rising to passionate fury. Klich's hooded eyes opened wide. They were dark pools of fear, a fear so terrible that it consumed him to the depths of his soul.

Death he might face with courage—as he had done often enough for his cause. But to be delivered alive into the hands of the Yugoslavs burning to avenge their dead king—that was another matter.

"Do not let him have me," he implored Renville, the words torn from him by a power over which even his half-mad courage had no control.

"Then tell me the truth," said Renville. "And see that it is the truth. For if you lie, the Yugoslavs shall have you as soon as your lies become apparent. You understand what that means?"

"We want heem now!" insisted the man in uniform.

"One moment, captain. I have no real right to give him to you. It is only that I must protect myself and my country against him that allows me to consider it. If he speaks the truth, he goes on trial here, and to prison here. If he lies—he goes to Belgrade. That is but fair. Speak up, Klich!"

Klich nodded. He was trapped, riven to the soul by a fear so dreadful that he could no longer endure it.

"I have placed explosives in the Capitol," he confessed. "A new explosive. I myself invented it. A very small amount will serve to destroy all life within a radius of five hundred feet. That amount is at this moment beneath the Speaker's desk in your House of Representatives."

"GOOD God!" gasped Renville. "How were you to set it off?" he demanded swiftly.

"By radio, from the rooms in the hotel," Klich confessed.

"By radio?"

"Yes. Another invention of my own. It is a box with a handle, like an ordinary firing-magneto."

"And the signal?"

"That was la Faure's idea. She hates you. She wanted you to give the signal—at the moment when the President was beginning his speech. It would be then that the charge would be fired."

"What could you gain by this, Klich? What could be the motive?"

Klich shrugged, his eyes inscrutable. "My gain is the destruction of tyrants," he said in his toneless voice. "Those others—they think they use me for their ends. What does it matter, so that I gain mine? I think that Winter is in the service of a certain Oriental empire. I think all this Red Hall business is but a blind, to fool your police. I think he wants them to believe that the Reds have done this crime, so that a wave of hatred against the Reds and against Russia will sweep your country. So shall the interests of his Emperor be advanced."

Even Klich's cold eyes wavered as he met his captor's eyes.

Renville saw. In a blinding flash of complete illumination, he saw the whole ugly plan. Of course the Reds would be blamed! Winter had planned it well. The country would be leaderless, with no hand at the helm to stay the wave of popular fury. The President, the Vice President, most of the members of the Cabinet, the Speaker of the House, most of the Senators—all would be wiped out. There would be war with Russia! America would be duped into playing the game of the yellow empires.

Thank God, there was yet time. The President's speech was for two o'clock that afternoon. There was time to act. Renville drew in a deep breath of relief and victory. He knew Klich had not lied. The fear in the man's eyes was too genuine.

"You have heard, captain? You will bear with me, I hope," he said, and ushered the reluctant officer from the room, leaving Klich to his bitter meditations.

Once the great door was slammed and

barred, Renville permitted himself a brief smile of triumph.

"Very well played, Paul!" he said to the man in uniform. "You were a Yugoslav naval officer to the life!"

"I am a Yugoslav by birth—so why not?" answered the other. "I could hardly keep my hands off the fellow as it was. Now, we have work to do, I fancy."

"We have, indeed. Too bad we won't be in at the death—but I think Naval Intelligence will listen to a warning from Argus. Why, Sally! What is it?"

Sally Starr came racing toward him, a terrible excitement stamped on her small, pale face.

"They've just phoned! Our men at the Capitol, I mean. The hour has been changed! The President is going to deliver his message at nine o'clock—and he's just left the White House!"

"Get the boys—a car—quick!" Renville snapped to Paul. "Sally! Phone Naval Intelligence! Tell them there are explosive charges under the Speaker's desk! Make them believe you—get the Director himself. Phone the D. J. people, too, and the Capitol police."

He was running, shouting the orders over his shoulder, when from a door at his right a girl leaped out to seize his arm—Sonia.

"Take me with you!" she begged. "Please—please!"

"No time!" panted Renville, jerking loose from her frantic grasp. "Stay here, Sonia. I'll be back. Take care of her, Sally. If they find her they'll kill her!"

Sally's brown eyes flashed. A quick retort trembled on her lips, but Renville was gone, racing for the stairway. She would obey—as always.

Renville's feet hammered on the steps as he dashed upstairs, into his own room. From a closet packed with disguises, he grabbed an American naval uniform, sped down and into the car as it shot round the corner of the house. Three men were in it—Paul, Jimmy, and Haydon, at the wheel.

"The Red Hall! And to hell with traffic cops!" Renville choked out. The car roared forward, leaping through the gate and out on to the highway.

They wouldn't believe Sally, he knew. The world was too full of cranks. It was up to him, now.

HE wriggled into the uniform, and in a moment, he was a lieutenant of the American Navy, to all outward appearances. His brain had worked ahead of time, and already he saw his one chance. The Red Hall would be guarded, yes. But if he could pretend to be still under Winter's hypnotic spell, he might get in. No one would know how he had got away. Winter's very self-confidence would make him believe. And with the uniform, it might work.

"Drop me a block from the place. Follow. If there's trouble, shoot your way in and wreck the radio mechanism," he ordered his men, after explaining the deadly plot to them. "But that's a last resort. They'd have time to set it off before you could get to them. I may be able to get in without arousing suspicion. It's our one hope."

Sally was on the job. For in front of the old hotel, as Renville walked at a steady, even pace toward the doorway, a beggar whined for alms.

"They didn't believe Miss Starr," he muttered, close to Renville's ear. "Laughed at her. The President has just entered the Capitol. Any orders?"

"Stand by to help Jimmy."

Renville went on into the hotel. His whole being was tense. Everything depended on the next three or four minutes. He ascended the stairs, followed by the curious gaze of the usual loungers.

On the first floor, all was silent. The second floor, too, was utterly quiet. Then came the third. Renville stood in the corridor from which he had fled. The door opening into the room where he had drunk the drugged wine was at his right. He opened it, walked slowly in.

There was no one there, and he crossed to another door. He dared not stop to listen; he was acting a part, now, the part of a man under a hypnotic spell. He opened the second door.

Winter was bending over an instrument on the floor—a vivid red box, with a plunger handle, and wires connecting it to a switchboard on the wall. By his side stood Madeleine Faure. She whirled as she saw Renville, and snatched an automatic out of her dress.

"I am here, sir," said Renville in a low, flat voice.

Winter straightened instantly. His eyes widened, then contracted. A sinister smile wreathed his lips.

"You came, after all!" said he. "I knew you were coming. The watchers below have already reported. It is very well—save that you have come too late to be of assistance, Mr. Renville. In one more minute—" He shrugged and gestured toward the white dome of the Capitol, visible through the window, shining in the morning sunlight.

"You may wait and see the end," he said softly. He was the very embodiment of triumph, this spy. It was his great moment, the fulfilment of all his hopes and plans.

Madeleine Faure laughed. "If you could only know," she murmured. "But your mind is his, not your own. Too bad."

She lowered her gun—and in that moment, Renville leaped as a tiger leaps, straight for Winter's throat. His hands locked about the sallow flesh, and the weight of his rush knocked the smaller man sprawling to the floor, fighting with a concentrated savagery that was appalling in its fury.

But Renville was playing for too high stakes to be stopped. He lifted Winter by main strength and crashed his head down on the floor. Winter kicked and clawed, but Renville lifted him again and smashed him down, aware all the time that Madeleine was maneuvering for a clear shot at him.

Suddenly Winter went limp. Renville rolled over, bringing the spy's body between himself and Madeleine, and in that position his left hand shot out and ripped the wires free from the wall panel. Madeleine's gun was raised.

There was a sudden shout in the hall, the muffled thud of a pistol-shot. Madeleine fired at the same instant, and Renville felt a pain as of hot iron sear his arm. He rose to his knees and flung the inert body of Winter at the woman as she fired again. Snatching the deadly box from the floor, Renville hurled it crashing through the window pane—just as Jimmy and Haydon and Paul burst into the room, guns in hand.

They seized Madeleine, wrested her weapon from her while she fought with white-lipped, silent rage.

Winter lay on the floor. Blood was oozing from a hole in his forehead. Madeleine's last shot had found a billet after all, though not the billet she'd intended. It was vengeance enough.

"Leave her here," Renville ordered. "There'll be twenty thousand cops up here in five minutes, after all this shooting. Down the back stairs, boys, and out of this. We don't want to be found here."

They raced downward, and out through a side door to their car.

"You'll never get credit for this, chief," panted Jimmy as the car moved away from the curb. "The D. J. will say they did it all."

"I have my reward," said Renville, gravely. "Listen."

From a loudspeaker in front of a radio store, a mellow voice was flowing—flowing peacefully, steadily, purposefully.

"Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, gentlemen of the Congress—"

The voice of the President of the United States was delivering his message to the representatives of the people.

"That," said Renville softly, "is reward enough. Let's go home."

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SATAN'S MANDATE

"Trapped!" Flint yelled, as he caught Aline back from the advancing horde. But another crowd of maddened natives was rushing upon them from behind.

Damascus was in revolt—with thousands of maddened natives pouring through the streets like a flood of burning lava. The dread fanatic killer-circle, the Ismailian Brotherhood, had again been inflamed to slaughter. And in the thick of that howling bedlam, one turbaned figure smiled grimly. For it was this American secret agent's job to offer himself as live bait—to the master of the blood-crazed brotherhood!

CHAPTER I

The Scarlet Betrayer

NEITHER fire nor siege can leave lasting traces in Damascus. The "Pearl Set in Emeralds" has endured too many centuries to be troubled by the wrath of conquerors, or the hand of time. Damascus is an ever verdant fascination that has outlived many spoilers; but revolt was again simmering, and Harmon Flint had come to find out why.

As he emerged from the Horse Market and skirted the Serai, Flint saw an answer. Gallows were erected in the lordly public square. Three men hung by their necks, and there was no doubt that they were dead. They were Arabs, and from the breast of each grimy *djellab* hung a placard in French and Arabic. Flint could read either with ease, though the latter language was easier to his tongue and ear.

Bandits, the inscription termed them; but in the Moslem quarter, they were called saints and martyrs, and that difference of opinion would be written in red.

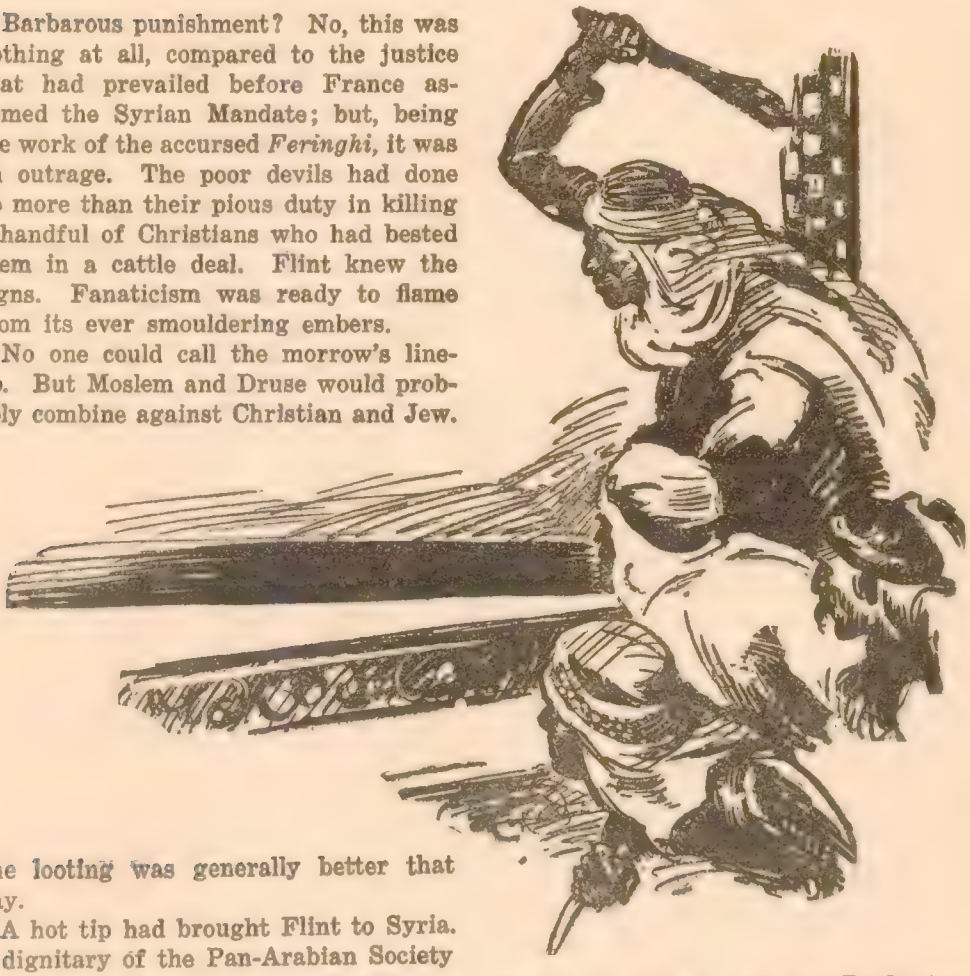
Thrilling Novel of Intrigue

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

Author of "The Devil's Catspaw," "Agents of the Iron Claw," etc.

Barbarous punishment? No, this was nothing at all, compared to the justice that had prevailed before France assumed the Syrian Mandate; but, being the work of the accursed *Feringhi*, it was an outrage. The poor devils had done no more than their pious duty in killing a handful of Christians who had bested them in a cattle deal. Flint knew the signs. Fanaticism was ready to flame from its ever smouldering embers.

No one could call the morrow's line-up. But Moslem and Druse would probably combine against Christian and Jew.



The looting was generally better that way.

A hot tip had brought Flint to Syria. A dignitary of the Pan-Arabian Society had been angling in Washington for an answer to a hypothetical question. If the French relinquished their Mandate, the society wanted to know, would the United States accept it? That savored of a hint—almost a promise—that France might want to leave Syria. Thus far, it was old stuff; but behind it was something new.

"See what Sanford Wallace is doing," Flint's chief had added.

That could refer only to oil, petroleum now flowing through the steel serpent that crept from Kirkuk, in Mesopotamia, crossed the Tigris and the Euphrates, then branched. One arm crossed the volcanic wastes of Transjordania to Haifa, on the coast; the other went due west to Syrian Tripoli, north of Damascus.

But to watch Sanford Wallace's latest —and undoubtedly his crookedest—petroleum intriguing, required finding that buccaneer before revolt swept Damascus.

Flint turned from the Merejeh Square and headed west, past the citadel. The bazaars would soon close, and he might need native costume in a hurry, once the show started.

He halted at the old clothes market, Sûk el Qamli, which in Arabic means "Louse Emporium." Flint had decided to discard tourist's tweeds and guide book, and put on a *djellab*—preferably an old and greasy one, and a grimier turban. When he wore this guise, any member of one of the dozen sects of Christians might knife him, on general principles—but the odds were better that way, as the Moslems were in the majority.

At Sûk el Qamli, Flint saw something odd. There was no reason why a girl from the States should not be interested in a glimpse of Sûk el Qamli; but it was strange indeed that she would be there on two successive days, each time at about the same hour. It was Flint's business to note oddities without seeming to do so; yet in this case, open admiration almost showed in his eyes.

She was undoubtedly American, and undeniably as much at home in Damascus as Flint. Her dark eyes were not wide with the eager wonder of the new arrival. They were narrowed in intent scrutiny, despite the smile that was like a pomegranate blossom.

"No, Saoud—that amber pipe stem," she said, as the swarthy merchant offered her a *narghileh* mouthpiece of carved ivory.

Not many tourists call native merchants by name, and collect accessories for Turkish water pipes; and the narrow-eyed glance that flashed from between long, black lashes warned Flint. He again buried his tanned face in his brand new guide book, but the street map of Damascus did not block his view.

Saoud's grimy fingers were not quite deft enough to escape his vigilance. The girl in the red hat had received more than the carved mouthpiece to fit the end of the six-foot, flexible tube of a *narghileh*. Saood had thrust into it a tightly rolled cylinder of paper.

SÛK EL QAMLI, in addition to being a louse bazaar, seemed also to be a private post office. To follow every potential spy in Damascus would be beyond any one agent; but before Flint could decide whether to waste an hour or two following a hunch and a pair of lovely ankles, he saw a middle-aged, fat-faced Armenian, in European clothes, ceremoniously lift his hat and greet the girl.

"Miss Clayborne—what a pleasure!" he exclaimed. "Yes—I arrived a day ahead of schedule."

"I'm so glad Paris can spare you for a while," she returned.

Flint recognized the Armenian. He was one Nazar Garabidian, who held the balance of power in the newly developed Mosul petroleum empire. And while Flint had not yet found Sanford Wallace, Garabidian suggested an approach to the mysteriously vanished pirate.

The problem was now less obscure. He could amend his chief's instructions to read, "Find out if the newly opened Mosul pipe line has anything to do with trouble in Syria." It did not require a vivid imagination to answer with a definite yes.

As Flint followed Garabidian and his lovely companion toward the Merejeh Square, he saw a French lieutenant gesturing toward a poster. A *poilu* tore it from the wall, but not before Flint had caught a few words of the Arabic script, which read:

DEATH TO THE KING OF IRAQ!
DEATH TO THE KING OF TRANSJORDANIA!
TRAITORS TO ISLAM, WHO HAVE SOLD THEIR BIRTHRIGHT FOR—

Flint knew that the next words must be "British gold." He knew, too, that if the person who had posted that sheet had not vanished in time, another body would be dangling from the gallows in the Merejeh Square. France could not afford to have Pan-Arabian riots and Syrian plots against the hand-made King of Iraq. In that case, the power behind his throne would cut off at the source the flood of petrol that the new pipe line brought to Tripoli for French battleships.

It no longer seemed odd that the opening of the Iraq line coincided with muttering in Damascus. But which oil mag-

nate was behind it? And how would the masters of intrigue use native fanaticism to their ends?

During the several hours after his following her to her hotel, Flint learned that the girl of Sûk el Qamli was Aline Clayborne, and that she came from the States. It was simple enough to get a table in the dining room of the Metropole so placed that he could watch her and her Armenian friend without being conspicuous.

Aline had changed from a simply tailored tweed ensemble to a shimmering black satin gown that seemed to be held in place by a miracle plus a cluster of pomegranate blossoms. Flint did not wonder that Garabidian's weary eyes became younger as they glanced at the white curve of her shoulders. Yet it was obvious that those two had met for more than dinner. Oddly enough, their conversation was casual and unguarded. It was not until the waiter poured Burgundy into hollow-stemmed glasses that Flint intercepted a remark which set him thinking.

"He'll be there," Aline assured the Armenian. "At Bab ash-Sharqa."

"But recognizing me—"

Aline smiled, plucked a pomegranate blossom from her shoulder, and pinned it to the Armenian's lapel. Her remark was lost in the subdued murmur of those who dined while Damascus simmered, but words were not needed to tell him that Nazar Garabidian would be recognized by that scarlet flower as he approached the eastern gate of the city, where The Street Called Straight opened into the orange groves beyond the walls.

Flint knew that the waiter had likewise heard and seen; yet the shrewd Armenian oil king seemed to give that not a thought. The conclusion was that to Garabidian the proposed meeting needed no special garb of secrecy. But the Armenian had not seen Aline receive a *narghileh* stem into which a merchant at Sûk el Qamli had thrust a roll of paper.

Flint did not linger over his coffee and liqueur. Once out of the dining room, he was not long in finding a pomegranate blossom; but as he hurried past the Ommayad mosque, the scarlet flower was pinned to the inside of his coat, no more displayed than the Colt automatic in his shoulder holster.

THE more prudent of the two possible moves would be to wait at the Eastern Gate, but the chance that a servant would meet Garabidian to conduct him to the rendezvous would nullify the value of such observation. The alternative was to impersonate the Armenian; and even though such an imposture could not endure much scrutiny, Flint would at least find out whether Sanford Wallace was in the picture.

Thus, as he turned right and picked his way through the Christian quarter, Flint put the pomegranate blossom on his lapel. In another moment he was in The Street Called Straight, and the Eastern Gate was but a few paces ahead of him. He saw the dim, white blot of the *djellab* of some one who was waiting in the dense shadows of the jamb. At the same time, Flint heard a scarcely perceptible shuffling behind him, and felt the intensity of staring eyes. A quick glance from the corner of his eye caught two white-robed figures emerging from an alley which opened from the Jewish quarter.

Flint could now almost distinguish the features of the man who waited at the Eastern Gate. He heard the watcher say in a low voice, *"Az-zahr al ahmar!"*

"Ay, wallah! Az-zahr al ahmar," echoed a voice from the rear. "Yes, by God! The red flower!"

Flint sensed rather than saw the tensity of the white-robed figure at the gate, and caught the frosty gleam of steel touched by a vagrant moonbeam.

"Thibbahum!" rasped a guttural voice. "Strike—slay!"

Flint then knew that his impersonation of Garabidian had been all too successful; but he had anticipated the command a split second before it was uttered. As he flung himself aside, a curved blade raked his ribs.

The assassins, expecting to cut down a middle-aged Armenian, were caught off guard by the agility of their intended victim. Flint, though he crashed against the blank wall of a house that flanked the street, gained an instant's advantage. As he recovered, he drew his automatic, hoping by bluff and footwork to make a break. Despite his peril, he was looking forward to the next move. The blast of his pistol would precipitate a disastrous riot, and a possible encounter with the French officials.

The lurker at the gate had bounded forward, knife in hand. It was he who now cut off Flint's retreat toward the city, while those who had at first been in the rear now blocked his escape through Bab ash-Sharqa.

"Drop it, son of a pig!" Flint rasped in Arabic. But the threat of his pistol was wasted. The white-robed slayer bored in. Flint side-stepped, evading the murderous charge and smacking down with his automatic. The heavy barrel struck the armed wrist a crushing blow, and drove the gleaming steel tinkling to the paving.

With a yell of pain, the attacker screamed, "Saoud! Assad! Stop him —brother of a dog!"

Assad and Saoud, recovering from the lunge that had sent them piling headlong against a pilaster, wheeled about; but Flint had gained in the exchange. He was in the clear, and a long bound carried him diagonally across Derb al Mustakim. Two more, and he would dive into a narrow alley. Then, before he reached his mark, that black ravine disgorged a cluster of turbaned forms. Flint's retreat was checked before it was fairly started, and it was now too late to shift and run down Derb al Mustakim. Assad and Saoud were on his heels, ready to cut him down.

Flint had no resource but to cut loose with a blistering volley of pistol fire, blast his way clear, and pull the whole town about his ears. In a single instant, he again had to change his strategy. If a mob was to follow him, it would be better to go through the orange groves beyond the city walls than down Derb al Mustakim or the network of alleys on either side. Yet swiftly as he wheeled, he saw that the new arrivals, like the original attackers, wore white robes and red girdles.

Two of the trio were carrying a man in evening dress, and had not yet dropped their burden. The silver haft of a dagger gleamed from his shirt front. Nazar Garabidian had died *en route* to Bab ash-Sharqa.

"THIBBAHUM!" roared the black-bearded chief. "Shaytan rip you open! He knows! He wears a red flower—"

The blast of Flint's automatic drowned the leader's command. Assad doubled up, dropped his *khanjar*, and clutched his stomach as he pitched backward. Saoud crashed home as the pistol shifted. His blade slashed Flint's parrying forearm; but before he could strike again, the pistol muzzle was jammed against his side, coughed fire and lead.

All had happened in a brace of deadly seconds, and the road was clear. Flint leaped toward Bab ash-Sharqa as the second detachment of assassins poured from the alley and into the street.

"Stop him!" raged the chief. "He knows—"

The quarter was now a howling madhouse. Voices yelled from behind blank walls. Door bolts slammed into place. Damascus had heard enough to know that some one had declared open season. An earthen jar, hurled from a housetop, missed Flint's head by a hair and crashed to shards behind him. A knife whizzed past. He ducked, whirled, and hosed the narrow street with lead. The fleet-footed leader of the pursuit crumpled in a heap. A tongue of flame spurted from a barred window, but Flint, clearing Bab ash-Sharqa, did not pause to return the fire. He stretched long legs toward the outlying orange groves, and the luxuriant vegetation that lined the banks of the Barada. As he reached the bridge which crosses that lovely stream, he holstered his fuming pistol,

plucked from his lapel the scarlet blossom that had survived the street fight, and flung it over the side.

He watched it float down the Barada, then grimaced wryly and observed, "Moonlight in Damascus must be great with a girl like Aline."

Flint crossed the river and headed upstream along the road that leads to the square. The bearded chief of the assassins could scarcely have a lasting picture of a face seen only for an instant by moonlight, but he had noted Flint's pomegranate blossom, and the grapevine telegraph of the Orient would do the rest. The waiter who had heard Aline's directions to the late Nazar Garabidian would be the first link in the assassin's chain of inquiry.

A swift trip out of town was indicated, but Flint's work in Damascus was just beginning. He had not yet made contact with Sanford Wallace, and the murder of the Armenian oil king confirmed his earlier impression that petroleum was behind the murmurings in Damascus. Aline Clayborne, moreover, had become a highly interesting person. That Saoud who had just stopped a stream of copper-jacketed bullets was the very one who had, at Sûk el Qamli, sold the girl the *narghileh* mouthpiece. The next move was to get in touch with Aline before it was too late.

Flint's dinner jacket was ripped from collar to hem, and his sleeve was slashed. Fortunately, the superficial cuts had not drenched him with blood, and he was able to get to his room without being conspicuous. Nevertheless, his damaged clothing was a problem. As soon as investigation indicated him as the stranger who had escaped from the riot at the Eastern Gate, his rooms would be searched either by spies or the police. Attempting to destroy or dispose of the slashed clothing would be as dangerous as keeping it.

He solved the difficulty by carelessly hanging his dinner clothes in a closet, so that they would be the first to come to a snooper's eye. It was a flimsy device, but more certain than concealment. Swiftly, he changed into another tuxedo and fresh shirt.

He learned at the Metropole that *Mademoiselle* Clayborne was not in. That was a decided advantage, and Flint lost no time in following it up. The lock on her door offered no difficulties. The third of his compact kit of skeleton keys admitted him to Aline's suite. The tweed ensemble was tossed across the back of a chair, and nearby was her red hat. On the dresser was a grim reminder of the trap which he had just evaded—a spray of pomegranate blossoms, flowers from the garden of death.

A lingering odor of stale cigarette smoke indicated that she had not returned since dinner. Flint lost no time in searching the dresser. A glance showed that she was installed in the Metropole for a protracted visit, and the absence of trunks and hand luggage confirmed the opinion.

What most interested him was the amber pipe stem he found among the cosmetics that littered the top of the dressing table. The tightly rolled bit of paper which Saoud had slipped into the mouthpiece was gone. That, however, was to be expected. Flint's eyes narrowed to steel-gray slits as he pocketed the carved amber and glanced at the ash tray. Then his craggy features relaxed in a contented grim.

In her haste to keep her engagement with the Armenian oil king, Aline had apparently been careless in her burning of the note she had received from Saoud. She could scarcely have anticipated that anyone could see any connection between her room and the death of Garabidian near Bab ash-Sharqa. While the paper was burned, the carbonized remains had not been ground to powder. Flint's sharp eyes detected legible characters, and to get even a few words would help.

He stepped to the dresser and emptied a box of exotically scented powder. That would be a good container for the fragile evidence. Then with tweezers from Aline's manicure set he began picking the burned bits of paper from the ashes on the smoking stand.

One fragment clearly showed the initials "S.W."—Sanford Wallace. Aline's careless haste was implicating the American oil pirate. Flint pocketed the powder box and stepped into the hall. There was no one in sight, but as he turned to lock the door, he caught a whiff of familiar fragrance. He sensed that eyes were spearing him. There was a scarcely audible sighing of silk, but before he could turn, something hard and firm was jabbed against his ribs. He felt the unpleasant, unmistakable contact of a pistol muzzle. Then an equally unmistakable voice murmured, "Don't move, please. Just leave the door unlocked and step right back in."

THE unwavering pressure of the pistol warned him that this was no time to risk a break. American women have a sinister record for indoor shooting at masculine targets.

"Believe it or not," he remarked as he crossed the threshold, "I was just about to leave a note at your door."

In the mirror he caught the scarlet malice of Aline Clayborne's smile as she countered, "Not so good. I'd been expecting a caller, so I waited in a room across the hall and saw you. I waited to see what you'd take. Some one searched my room yesterday. Is this your return engagement, or are you a meter reader?"

Flint grimaced wryly and chuckled. "No. My line's Fuller brushes. Now put that pistol away and let's be sociable. I've been most anxious to meet you, ever since I heard you were from the States. I'm Harmon Flint, from Keokuk, Iowa."

"Mmm . . . Do you know, I could almost believe you," she murmured. But the pistol did not retract, and Aline's fingers deftly probed Flint's pocket. As she extracted her powder box, she added, "This places you definitely enough, Mr. Flint. I'm almost sorry I didn't let you take that charred paper with you, so you could study it until you finally found out it was bait, all in my own handwriting. You spies are so terribly suspicious."

Her fingers closed on the butt of Flint's automatic. "Now, sit down," she invited. "I'll keep the artillery."

Flint relaxed and drew a long breath. Aline would not be so amiable if she had found the amber stem in his vest pocket. That trinket would have betrayed his definite knowledge of her message center at Sûk el Qamli, whereas taking scraps of burned paper indicated merely a rather general quest for information.

For a moment they eyed each other. It was only then that Flint realized how uncommonly lovely she was. For all their feminine delicacy of modeling, Aline's features were determined and intelligent. She'd make some big executive a wonderful secretary—until she married him. Aline was all woman, but without a trace of fragility. Then Flint remembered Garabidian, and the tawny-eyed girl seemed like a crouching tigress.

"I wish I could believe you," she said, finally, after her long-lashed eyes had approvingly noted the rugged contours of Flint's face. "So I could ask you what it's all about. You're not at all the type I expected to catch snooping around here."

"I'm sorry I'm not what you expected," apologized Flint. The twinkle of his eyes contradicted the solemnity of his voice. "I've spread lots of sunshine and sweetness in my time, and not a dissatisfied customer so far."

"I can believe that!" Aline laughed. "But can you offer me one good reason for not calling the police?"

"Plenty," said Flint. "Suppose I told the police I was looking for Sanford Wallace? Suppose they forced me to tell why I wanted to see him?"

He struck a light to a cigarette. Aline's eyes narrowed, and her pistol drooped to her knee. Flint did not try to snatch it. There was no use. He had scored. She was thinking hard.

"You interest me," she said slowly. He knew that she meant it. "Meet me tomorrow night. We'll dine early, and maybe I can tell you a few things about Mr. Wallace. And you might tell me why you expected to find information about him in my rooms."

"I'll do that now," offered Flint. "I followed Nazar Garabidian from Paris, where I picked up a hot tip that he would confer with Wallace in Damascus. And this evening, in the dining room, I concluded that you must be Wallace's secretary—simply because you don't look as though you'd have any other reason for entertaining Garabidian."

"You do jump at conclusions." She smiled. "But that wasn't bad guessing. Here's your pistol, Mr. Flint. And I'm awfully glad I didn't miss you this evening."

He paused long enough at the door to say, by way of good-night, "I wish you'd wear that same black gown to-morrow night. And a Damask rose would lend it just the perfect touch of color . . ."

But as the door clicked shut behind him, Flint wondered whether Aline would pin a floral decoration on his lapel. There were many other ways of putting him on the spot; and though his improvised story was strictly water-tight, he was certain that no matter how harmlessly he could represent it, his interest in Sanford Wallace would put assassins on his trail. But if live bait was needed, so be it.

CHAPTER II

"Kill the Infidels!"

FLINT realized that his hasty looting of Aline's room had definitely branded him. Only a spy would be interested in charred paper; but Aline's using such bait to trap some one she suspected of having been on her trail put her in the same category. The honors were even—until assassins overtook him in some corner of fanatic Damascus.

"Who else is on her trail?" Flint asked himself as he left the Metropole. But before he could devise a tentative answer, he saw that business was picking up in Damascus. Detachments of troops were marching across the square—noncoms posting extra guards. And he saw that five bodies now hung on the gallows where there had been but three. The two latest wore red girdles, and their white robes were sodden with blood that was dark in the glare of the overhead lights. He knew the answer even before he picked out intelligible scraps from the guttural mutterings of the natives who milled about the square, or read the placards on the chests of the dangling figures.

The bodies of the assassins he had accounted for in shooting his way clear of the ambuscade intended for Nazar Garabidian were swaying in the evening breeze as a warning to evildoers.

"*Mashallah!*" growled some one at his left. "Who would believe that Armenian dog could kill two young men . . . God curse these *Feringhi* pigs for defiling the bodies of true believers . . . But Islam will take vengeance . . . death to the King of Iraq. . . ."

It was only a confused, broken muttering from the sullen crowd; but those disjointed fragments were clear as a formal declaration to Flint. Some one was bringing the British-owned King of Iraq into the discussion to profit by the resentment aroused by the newly suspended bodies. And from another quarter of the crowd he heard it repeated. "Infidel Armenians, slaying two true believers. . . ."

"May God curse them!" echoed another.

Flint, attuned to the pulse of the still undecided mob, sensed the direction some one was giving its muttering. They knew that the bodies had been found at the edge of the Christian quarter—and bit by bit the crowd became convinced that several Armenians had killed the two Moslems whose bodies dangled in the square.

But what had the King of Iraq to do with it? That recurrent motif puzzled Flint, and worried him. There was more to it than appeared on the surface.

A blare of bugles cut into his thoughts. Then came a roll of drums, and troops began clearing the square. Non-commissioned officers were warning Europeans to get under cover. A machine-gun platoon was taking its post to enfilade the fronts of the hotels that

faced the square. Coal black Senegalese appeared from an alley, dumped sandbags from their broad shoulders and filed back for more.

Another bugle blast sounded. Flint saw the frosty glitter of fixed bayonets as an infantry detachment emerged from the street leading from military and administrative headquarters. A captain commanded them; but one glance at the man who followed the first platoon made Flint catch his breath and crane his neck.

That man was General Ledoux, in full dress uniform. He was accompanied by his *aide de camp*. The troops countermarched and formed a square. Then the majesty of France was made manifest in the proclamation that the governor-general read.

"The damn fool!" Flint growled between gritted teeth. "He couldn't think of a better way to precipitate a mess. He's asking for it!"

THE general's leathery face, square jaw, waxed moustaches, and deep chest, glittering with medals, marked him as an honorable successor to those who had blundered before him. Like them, he was a stern, valiant old soldier who knew no more about governing a province than he did about embroidery. But his voice rang with iron, and the muttering subsided. Ledoux was a blunderer, but he was a man.

"In the name of the French Republic!" he began. "Unless the uncaptured murderers of Nazar Garabidian, a British subject, are delivered to justice by sunset to-morrow, so that they can be surrendered to the British Government, the Moslem quarter of Damascus will be shelled for thirty minutes. If at the end of that time, the miscreants are not delivered, the *shaykh* of every quarter of the town will be held subject to capital punishment for aiding and abetting sedition and disorder."

The general paused after each sonorous phrase, so that his *aide de camp* could translate it into Arabic. The general's twenty years' service in Algeria had given him a fluent command of that language, but French was the official tongue of the Syrian Mandate, and no governor-general could abase himself by using the vernacular.

A British subject, the proclamation had called Nazar. That was not news to Flint, but the emphasis smote him between the eyes. Britain controlled the Mosul oil fields. France had to be nice. But the most revelatory of all was in the general's opening words, " . . . the uncaptured murderers."

How did Ledoux know the number involved? How did he know that the survivors had escaped? It was that, and not the severity of the ultimatum that caught Flint squarely on the chin. Some crafty schemer, some diabolical intriguer, had used Ledoux as a tool to precipitate revolt, and had informed him that a wealthy British subject had been murdered by Moslems in Damascus. For despite Garabidian's bitter quarrel with London oil magnates, he was still a naturalized citizen of the Empire, and his person was sacred on foreign soil.

"That everlasting fool," groaned Flint as he heard the Arabic repetition of the ultimatum. "Shell the city, and line the *shaykhs* up before a firing squad if they don't turn in the assassins!"

The crowd was silent—a vague, shapeless mass of shapeless figures, dressed in silken *kufiayahs* and *ighals*, and white turbans. The white, brown, and dirt-colored *djellabs* were milling, shifting, but voiceless.

The majesty of France finally subsided, and so did the Arabic echo of the *aide de camp*. The iron face of Ledoux contracted from that of an orator to the grim, resolute mask of the soldier who for forty years had defied lead, fire, and steel. A great man was Ledoux—on the battlefield. But what fool had put Ledoux in charge of Syria? What malevolent schemer had moved him to deliver such an ultimatum?

As Flint watched the square reform to escort the governor-general back to headquarters, he shaped an answer from the day's events—Sanford Wallace plus Aline Clayborne. It was time now to

take cover, or else to don native dress and, with the conquered, face bombardment in order to ferret out the hiding place of Sanford Wallace. There remained but the choice of the hour. Flint wondered whether the detonations of seventy-fives would interrupt his dinner with Aline Clayborne, the following night.

"Don't worry," he grimly answered himself. "Living that long will be a real break! I'll be lucky if— Good God! Watch it!"

FROM the corner of his eye, Flint had caught the first hint of the movement which wrenched the warning yell from his lips and made his hand dart toward his pistol. But even as he shouted, he knew that it was too late, and that his marksmanship could do no more than implicate him. The insane daring of the attack paralyzed Flint.

Three men had bounded from behind pilasters that narrowed the exit from the square so that a column of fours could just file out. The light that glared on the bodies dangling from the gallows reached but dimly to the edge of the square, and to General Ledoux's medal-glittering chest. But Flint saw that the trio, bounding like hunting leopards, wore white robes and red girdles.

It was over in an instant, over before it began. Curved steel flashed. A non-com's pistol crackled. There were yells, commands, the sound of rifle butts crunching into bone, and the whiplash blast of a Lebel—but the white-robed avengers from the shadows had carried the general to the ground, stabbing and slashing, though their broken, lead-riddled bodies were being battered to pulp.

The general's voice boomed like rumbling thunder, then cracked from the mighty effort. He was on his feet again, but Flint saw a knife haft in his chest, and the red hand that still clutched it. Yet that iron man was roaring a command.

Then a white flash descended from a cornice, a white flash blending with steel and a streak of red. But that fourth assassin, swooping like a falcon, wasted the life that the milling platoon shot and hammered out of him. Ledoux fell before the slayer could strike him. Four madmen had given their lives for the life of the governor-general of Syria. Four fanatics, knowing they could not escape, would be welcomed to *al Jannat*, the Moslem paradise for those who die slaying the infidel.

Commandant Maubert, the *aide de camp*, took charge before his chief sank a second time. The troops deployed, rifles at the ready, bayonets gleaming thirstily. Bugles sounded the alarm. Orderlies followed behind squads armed with rifle butts, battering through the milling, howling crowd. The mob began surging away from the square in every direction which offered refuge from the wrath to come, the momentarily expected, vengeful volley. But before Flint could wonder as to what delayed the rattle of machine guns and the ragged crackle of musketry, he picked scattered phrases from the Arabic uproar—words that burned into his brain, touching off long-buried recollection.

"The Ismailian Brotherhood . . . the Society of Hasheesheen . . . hunting the infidel dogs. Now they'll get the King of Iraq."

And above the yelling and cursing and groaning of fugitives bayoneted and struck down by rifle butts, Flint caught the recurring wrathful yell, "Death to the King of Iraq! Death to the King of Transjordania!"

The surging, frenzied mob swept him along. Pommeled, kicked, pounded as by a raging surf, Flint was swept by an eddy at the fringe of the rabble which headed back toward the Metropole. But he scarcely felt the danger of drifting on that sea of wrath and fear. For while all that howling for the head of the British-owned King of Iraq dominated the confusion, there was a sinister undertone that chilled his heart—that ominous mention of the Ismailian Brotherhood.

Flint wondered, as he reeled into the lobby, why he had not sooner realized

the significance of the slayers in white robes bound with red girdles. He knew now that an ancient curse had been revived to spread destruction. The secret and dreadful Society of Hasheesheen, which in the days of the Crusades had spread terror and death among Moslem and Frank alike, was stalking again with its traditional dress and method of operation. Drug-crazed slayers, bound by the oath of their order, driven by blood lust and promise of paradise, were again making their suicidal attacks.

Saladin and Baibars had trembled on their thrones at the threat of that secret captain of murderers, Shaykh el Djibal —the Old Man of the Mountains—whose vassals slew Conrad of Montferrat, and later murdered Nizam al Mulk in the midst of his guards.

Now they were crying for the head of the king of Iraq, having tested their steel on the governor-general of Syria. Fugitives were already leaving Damascus, heading for Jerusalem to carry the word to the Pan-Arabian league to broadcast. Cables to London would be simmering with the news that Damascus was the headquarters and origin of a recrudescent curse that threatened all the Near East, wherever natives prospered but chafed under British rule.

"And France gets one hell of a black eye," Flint said to himself. "She is in bad if a white-robed, red-belted Willie as much as flings one piece of camel dung at an official in Iraq or Transjordania. And if either hand-made king is knifed—"

HE did not have time to add anything more. He instinctively ducked, then pitched headlong against a column as an ominous, alarming whistling ended in a sullen, surging blast that shook the tiles beneath his feet. As he recovered, Flint heard the ear-splitting roar of a French seventy-five. They were shelling Damascus. From the east, he heard the chatter of a machine gun. Then came another explosion, a second shell. A high-pitched, many throated howling, and a crackle of musketry broke out above the dull, rumbling confusion that now shook the city.

The show was on. Before Flint could react to the dozen compulsions that urged him in as many different directions, a blow like a pile driver flattened him to the floor. A terrific compression constricted his chest, blasted the very breath out of his body, paralyzed him so that he could not inhale another. Masonry and plaster and shards of glass rained about him, and a billow of black, nitrous smoke poured through a gaping hole in the further wall of the lobby. Whether by intent or hasty laying, a shell had struck a wing of the Metropole. The machine guns were chattering faster, and the volume of musketry had increased tenfold. All manner of rifles were now popping, not only Lebels, but weapons dug out of hiding places for such an occasion.

Damascus was in open revolt. Vague, blurred figures ran yelling and screaming through the wrecked lobby. Employees, guests, loungers—all dashed through the smoke and clouds of dust to get out of the zone of fire. It had all happened faster than the mind could grasp, but as the fragments of another shell whistled through the shattered wall, Flint knew that his next move was to find Aline. She was the link that would connect him with the master of the show.

Red-girdled assassins had attacked him and cut down Garabidian. Aline's connection with the terror that swept Damascus was now clear as the ever increasing spatter of rifle fire. He bounded toward the staircase, then whirled as a wave of yelling natives surged into the lobby. One glance was enough.

They were armed; not fugitives, but looters and slayers brandishing knives, scimitars, flint-lock *jezails*, clubs—any and every weapon they could find. Then he saw Aline coming down the stairs, three at a time.

"Back!" he yelled, bounding forward and enveloping her with his left arm as his right hand reached for his pistol.

She was pale, but there was no fear

in her clear eyes. In a flash, she had appraised the situation. She turned. Feet pounded across the lobby. There was a many-throated yell as the looters saw Flint.

"Kill the infidel dogs! Kill them!"

"Run for it!" he barked, jerking aside as a barrage of missiles spattered about. He deliberately leveled his pistol. For a moment, it crackled with deadly evenness. Men fell, and the assault broke, but only for a moment. Yet that moment was all that he needed. Flint bounded after Aline, and as he overtook her on the second floor, he realized that for a moment he had forgotten that she was an enemy, the assistant of fanatic slayers.

Then the reorganized looters came pouring up the stairway. At any moment a shell might blast them to pieces, but first they would taste infidel blood.

"WHICH way?" demanded Flint as they emerged in the clearer air of the second floor.

"Straight ahead, and down to the rear exit."

They had gained a few seconds on the invaders; but before that perilously scanty advantage could be capitalized, Flint knew that retreat had been cut off. From the rear came a splintering of wood, a heavy pounding, and the screech of tortured metal. Another mob was assaulting the rear of the Metropole. The shattering of glass, guttural yells, and exultant hooting swelled into a roar that blended with the deeper sound that boomed from the square. Another shell burst in the rear of the Metropole.

"Finish!" snapped Flint, catching Aline's hand. "We're trapped in the midst of it. That's why they're bombarding this quarter."

An open door suggested momentary refuge. He bounded to the left, jerking his companion after him. They cleared the threshold just in time to keep from being caught between the two waves of looters in the hallway. Flint saw that they were in Aline's room. The outer confusion gave them an instant of grace. The rioters would not assault all doors at once, but would follow their leaders lest some one gain an unfair portion of the plunder.

Aline still wore her black satin gown. The flowers of doom glowed at her shoulder. Flint knew that with fair luck he had a chance of escape; but to pilot a lovely woman through that ravenous mob would be beyond a miracle. Her bare arms and white shoulders, her unveiled face would mark her as a foreign woman, and the raging fanatics would do the rest.

There seemed to be no chance for Aline. Flint's pistol was half emptied. The door of an adjoining room crashed down, and glass tinkled and furniture smashed to bits as the looters probed for abandoned finery. But that instant gave him his inspiration. He snatched a negligee from the dresser, ripped it from collar to seam, ripped the green silk again, and twisted it about his head. He now wore a turban, and of the color worn by pious *hajis* who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca. Despite his European clothing, the Moslem headgear might save the day. Many of the more prosperous natives wear a mixed costume. Aline, at a glance, caught the play and bounded to the clothes closet. She jerked forth a splendidly embroidered *djellab* with flowing sleeves, and a pair of red leather *babouches*.

"Got these for a friend back home," she panted. "He'll never miss them!"

She turned to the window as Flint donned the flowing garment, kicked off his shoes, and slipped his feet into the red *babouches*. He whirled just in time to drag her from the sill.

"Stay here!" he snapped. "You'd not last ten seconds in that alley."

"You'd have a chance alone," she countered. "As one of the looters. But me —you idiot, you'll just get torn to pieces trying to get me through that mob. Right now, I'm living on time borrowed from you."

She spoke in a succession of gasps. Then a crash at the door broke into the argument. Aline jerked clear of Flint's

detaining grasp and snatched her handbag from the bed. With another crash, a panel splintered. Then came the solid chunk of many bodies, the grunt of breath exhaled as they smashed home. The latch tore from its socket as Aline drew her pistol from her handbag.

Flint, however, did not reach for his automatic. He had but one play left, and as from the corner of his eye he saw the grimy, wrathful faces of the blood-lusting mob, he made it. Aline was quick, but Flint was faster.

In one move, his arm encircled her, and his free hand struck aside the flame-spurting pistol. As he did so, he cursed her in a blast of Arabic that for an instant drowned the tumult of many voices and the distant rumble of the street fighting. The pistol clattered into a corner, and the black satin gown was ripped down the back as he flung her on the floor.

The blur of action and the thunder of Arabic wrath that had poured from his lips caught the mob off guard. This was not what they had expected. Then Flint half turned and faced them.

"Sons of lewd mothers! Who gave you permission to enter? This *Feringhi* wench is mine!"

The arrogant voice and the green turban of the *haji* whose ready hand had apparently saved himself from death at the hand of the *Feringhi* woman were convincing. He had the manner of a dignitary whose pleasures were not to be interrupted by mobs or bombardment. Yet the ruse hung in the balance. Pilgrim or no pilgrim, the crowd was out for blood and loot and women. A lawless, raw-boned Kurd growled an oath and shouldered his way to the front.

"By God, no Turk gives me orders!"

THOSE in the threshold swayed from the pressure of those in the rear. There was a muttering of approval. Loot was loot, and the room was rich. The sturdy mountaineer cleared the mob. Calling Flint a Turk was turning the tide.

All in a brace of seconds, Flint saw that his momentary prestige had crumbled. His rich *djellab* and silken turban had aroused envy in a land where a man is killed for a new pair of shoes. And Aline, prone at his feet, was too alluring in her gleaming black satin.

Flint's hand moved in a gesture that ended in a spurt of flame. The Kurd dropped. The heavy slug had caught him between the eyes and spattered blood in the faces of those behind him. After only one shot, Flint lowered his pistol before the mountaineer had fairly dropped, then solemnly demanded:

"Is it not written in the Holy Koran: 'O True Believers, enter not any house until ye have asked leave and have saluted the family thereof?' Therefore go in peace, brethren—and beg pardon of Allah!"

The dexterity of a trained gunner, bafflingly followed by a benediction and a reproof struck home.

"May God give you strength, *ya haji!*" answered one of the four among whom death would surely strike if they advanced a pace. "We did not know that she was your plunder."

The next move was difficult. Flint deliberately turned his back on the looters, and felt sweat cropping out on his forehead; yet he had to sustain the part he had elected. He jerked Aline to her feet, stripped the counterpane from the bed and flung it at her, commanding, "Cover thy face, O Shameless One!"

She understood the gesture rather than the words, and muffled her bare shoulders, raising the counterpane to hide all but her eyes. Flint turned, gesturing toward the door. The looters were withdrawing. Catching his captive by the hand, he drew her after him as he shouldered his way through the milling confusion. Presently they were in an alley that led to the El Amara quarter. It was crowded with fugitives heading toward the Beirut Road. Some were driving donkeys laden with baggage to the height of a camel. Others carried on their heads or backs whatever they had snatched from the ruins of their own houses or those of others.

Flint fought his way eastward, finally turning to the left and into an alley. The shattered façade of a substantial house suggested the next move. He half carried Aline through a shell crater and plunged into the smouldering wreckage.

"Let's do some looting of our own."

THE owners had left more than they had taken, and presently Flint and his protégée were native from the skin out, except for Aline's handbag and the pistol which she had retrieved in leaving her room at the Metropole.

"Now what?" she wondered, smiling wanly over the edge of the *yashmak* that concealed all but her tawny eyes.

"I'm still looking for Sanford Wallace —or would you prefer to work around toward the American consulate? I'll risk it, if you're game."

"Lord, no!" Aline protested. "Mr. Wallace's place is a lot closer. And we'd be safer there."

"Let's go!" said Flint, snatching at the opportunity cast at his feet by the wave of revolt. While he had thus far had no time to assimilate the swift succession of events, he began to see how the American oil pirate could benefit by the uprising.

If the King of Iraq were now murdered by Ismailian assassins working from their newly established headquarters in Damascus, British reprisal would cut off the petroleum that flowed from Kirkuk to Tripoli. In that case, Sanford Wallace's export oil business between the States and France would be restored. It was even possible that if Franco-British relations were badly strained, Wallace's clique could buy the French branch of the line and make that government purchase its own petroleum from him.

Flint had evidence enough to ruin that criminal intrigue; yet in the eyes of the law, it was not complete enough to make a case. His mission more than ever was to find Wallace; but as he headed for the Aleppo Road, he knew that his peril was increasing at every step.

Aline, he learned as they turned north, was Wallace's secretary. Therefore, despite his having saved her from the mob, to trust her too far would be suicidal. As he rounded out an impromptu plan for striking at the heart of the difficulty, he saw that a reversal of the deception he had used against the native looters might work against the American pirate.

It was Aline who put the words in his mouth. "Oh," she was saying, "I died a thousand times before you fooled that mob. Lord, it's utterly unbelievable that any American could beat them in their own language!"

Flint smiled thinly. In the darkness she could just distinguish the relaxation of his grim lips, and the sudden gleam of his eyes.

"I didn't fool them," he said quietly. "I've been fooling you."

"What?" There was an almost imperceptible disappointment in her voice.

"Yes. I'm a Syrian, and a Moslem. I'm really Haroun Sawân—Sawân being Arabic for Flint, and Harmon just a handy distortion of the name of that caliph they featured so heavily in the Arabian Nights."

"Oh." Suddenly her fingers reassuringly closed on his arm. "Anyway, I think you're a darling—and you look an awful lot like a white man."

That was the worst that Flint had endured in that entire night of murder and revolt. But he had won his case, and the next move was clear. Sanford Wallace would accept him as a native—and so might the Ismailian Brotherhood of Assassins. . . .

CHAPTER III

Bird of Satan

"*MIN?*" challenged a voice as they approached the end of a side road that branched to the left from the Aleppo Highway.

A white-robed figure with rifle at the port blocked their advance. Aline lowered her veil, and Flint explained that he was her emergency bodyguard. That satisfied the sentry, who summoned a

negro *bawwab* to usher them into the villa that loomed white among the surrounding foliage. The gate closed behind them, and Flint was in the fragrant garden of death, ready for the final play.

A broad-shouldered, heavy-jawed white man broke off his guarded conversation with a sharp-featured, hard-eyed native as the *bawwab* announced the fugitives. The former was Sanford Wallace, the latter was the leader of the assassins who had emerged from an alley of the Christian quarter, bearing the lifeless body of Nazar Garabidian! Flint knew that his life hung on a thread—dangled, rather, from a moonbeam, since his fate depended on how the light had fallen in the shattered arcade of the Street Called Straight. Then the momentary drumming of his heart subsided, and chills ceased racing down his spine. He recollected that his own face must have been in shadow, since the features of the other had been clearly illuminated. But his voice rang oddly in his own ears as he supplemented Aline's account of their escape from Damascus.

"I've been looking for you, Mr. Wallace," concluded Flint. "When I heard you intended expanding your Persian Gulf enterprises, it seemed like a chance to get back in the field. And, fortunately, to-night's uprising swept me right to your door."

"Engineer?" was the crisp question, as Wallace's slate-colored eyes surveyed the bronzed, rugged face below the green turban.

"Of a sort," admitted Flint. Then he briefly outlined a plausible pedigree.

"Hmmm." Wallace's thin lips tightened; then he said, "You certainly deserve something for getting my secretary out of a perilous situation." He turned to his Arab confrère and added, "Hussayn, maybe you can do something for Flint—or Haroun Sawân, now that he's back home again."

"Let's consider this a business proposition," interposed Flint, addressing Wallace before Hussayn could answer. "I was quite anxious to get out of range of French shells and machine-gun bullets, myself. If I helped Miss Clayborne, that is that. A thing done has an end, and I did not risk my head for any reward."

His bow was haughty and ceremonious as his voice. No Arab of quality would swallow Wallace's condescension. For an instant, his glance crossed Aline's. He noted her resentment and embarrassment.

"Here—wait a second, Sawân!" The oil pirate arose to make amends. "You fellows are too damn haughty for any good use. Make yourself at home till the riot's over, and in the meantime, you and Hussayn get together."

It was a tailor-made chance to remain and get to the bottom of things, but to accept would be a false note. Flint could not take the aggressive until he had dipped deeper into the intricacies of the plot. He had to play to Hussayn, who obviously was the pirate's prime minister. His status as a repatriated native required that approach.

Therefore, he replied, "Suppose I call in a day or so, Mr. Wallace, when you yourself can talk to me."

Refusing at the time to deal with the second in command was necessary. He bowed formally to Wallace and Aline. Hussayn accompanied him across the court.

"That father of many little pigs!" muttered Flint in Arabic. "It's a wonder you've not slit him crosswise."

"He pays well, like all these *Feringhi* fools," countered Hussayn.

"That might make a difference," Flint conceded.

In the half-gloom, they eyed each other in mutual appraisal; then Hussayn demanded, "Are you a Shia or Sunni Moslem?"

The nearest American equivalent to such a question would be, "Are you a Protestant or a Catholic?" But there is no American equivalent for the bitter hatred between the two major sects of Islam. Flint, however, had seen the Ismailian Brethren at work, and he knew the answer.

"It's been a long time since I said, 'God curse Omar,' " he replied. "But may

Shaytan rip me open if I'm a Sunnite!"

Flint was walking on eggs. Cursing Omar, the first caliph, is fundamental with all good Shiyite Moslems; yet as one who had for years been away from his native country, he could not be as vociferous as a pilgrim from Shirz without overdoing it. He breathed more easily when his shrug and amiable grin brought an answering smile from Hussayn.

"*Wallah,* you may after all come in handy," the Arab admitted. "*Ay billahi!* Haroun, you may do very well. But see me to-morrow."

WHEN Flint headed back toward the red glare of Damascus, he was certain that he had made progress. He was by no means confident that Aline's gratitude would insure her silence about his rifling her room. While he hoped for some flaw in the evidence that involved her in the mesh of murderous intrigue that had sent the Armenian to a deadly ambush, he remembered the doings of other female spies. Rather than trust her, he placed his faith in his own ability to work his way into Hussayn's clique of assassins, and thus unravel the sinister tangle. It would take many days of Oriental circumlocution. Nevertheless, it could be done.

Wallace was hiring a crew of Ismailian fanatics; but whoever sups with the devil needs an iron spoon.

Flint's attention was momentarily distracted from his problem by the sound of a low-flying airplane. It was almost overhead, and he wondered why any of the Army planes that had been circling over Damascus since the beginning of the rioting should be so far from the center of the disturbance. The cessation of the engine's roar told him that it was landing. That was food for quick thought. There were no fields in the northern portion of the plains of Dimeshk ash-Sham—only walled gardens and orchards. Yet he was certain that the pilot had not been forced down by engine trouble. There had been no premonitory sputter or backfiring to indicate a clogged gas line or an empty fuel tank.

For a moment, a dark blot masked the stars, and he heard the whistle of air past the struts. Then a subdued but perceptible glow appeared on the ground. Flint turned his back to Damascus. The plane was worth investigating; but instead of continuing up the Aleppo Highway past Wallace's villa, he cut right, threading his way through the network of lanes and small estates that make the plains of Damascus a verdant labyrinth. The momentary glow of subdued landing lights was now extinct, but he had marked its position.

It was not yet midnight. The evening had opened early and moved fast, but Flint sensed that the tempo was speeding up even more. A scarcely perceptible sound warned him. He felt rather than heard a movement. Some sense beyond the normal five perceived the intent scrutiny from the darkness behind him. The hunters were on his trail; and only by precipitate flight could Flint evade them. Such a course, however, would keep him from investigating that unusual airplane landing.

He slipped into a narrower and darker lane, and as he rounded the corner, he crossed, skirted its further wall, and lengthened his stride. Then, glancing back, he saw a vague shape silhouetted for a moment against the brighter background as the stalker rounded the corner. Flint gradually gained distance, rounded another corner, and ducked into an archway. He drew his pistol and waited, certain that he had not aroused the enemy's suspicion. He had seen too much of ambush and assassination that night to be sqeamish, and a stealthy stalker should know the risk he runs.

A dark figure swung clear of the jamb and paused, as if to probe the gloom and pick out the white *djellab* that should be somewhere ahead. Flint gathered himself for the attack. Another pace—and then the hunter sensed his peril, felt the menace that radiated from the blackness. He wheeled, saw the crouching figure and the flash of blue metal.

There was an answering flash of steel, a low-voiced, guttural snarl, and a darting blade almost reached its mark. The charge drove Flint smashing against the masonry, but his pistol barrel hammered home. Then came another crunching blow, an aimless, raking jab, and the hunter slumped to the hard roadway.

As Flint's eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he knelt and plucked the knife from the stalker's lifeless fingers. He recognized the *bawwab* who had ushered him and Aline into Wallace's villa; but it was not clear whether he had followed Flint to find out the secret agent's destination, or to overtake and kill him.

"Unfortunately, I couldn't stop and ask him," Flint muttered between clenched teeth. But this was no time for speculation. That riddle would have to take care of itself until he had investigated the airplane landing not more than a mile north of Wallace's estate.

The body of the *bawwab* presented a serious problem. For it to be discovered where it lay would prove that Flint had not gone to Damascus, but had retraced his steps. To carry it to the outskirts of the city and then return would be a ruinous loss of time. Necessity drove him to a short cut. He shouldered the *bawwab's* body and boosted it over the wall of the estate that faced the lane. The owner, upon discovering it, would do the discreet thing—say nothing, bury it among his olive trees, and avoid the risk of dangerous complications. The gardens of Damascus have guarded many secrets. . . .

That done, Flint checked his bearings, and set out for the mysterious landing field. It was just midnight—and if Hussayn's slave did not return, who could say what might have happened to him in the confusion of the city?

AFTER two miles of circuitous prowling, Flint heard a murmuring of voices and caught a whiff of exhaust fumes and the reek of hot oil. It was enough to tell him that the estate inclosed by an eight-foot wall could not contain many trees. He shed his turban and white *djellab*, wadding them under his arm. The dark *kaftan* he wore beneath would be less conspicuous. He had lost too much time to permit reconnaissance. In a moment, he had cleared the wall.

At the further end of the field was a Durand-Falcon bomber, one of the powerful new machines recently sent from France to Syria. The estate had been cleared of vines and trees; yet to land a plane in that limited area required the utmost skill. Something big was in the wind, and it was manifestly not the doings of the French government, despite the insignia on the Durand-Falcon. Flint, however, had seen but the beginning of the unusual. The stealthy approach of several turbaned figures from the left of the plane drew his attention from the cubical bulk of the house at its right.

They carried petrol tins, but they were not gassing up for a flight. They were siphoning gasoline from the capacious tanks and taking it away into the darkness at the further wall. One stood by, keeping careful check on the amount removed.

It was too much for Flint to digest. He skirted the wall, secure in the shadows which smoking kerosene flares could dissipate for no more than a few yards beyond the Durand-Falcon. As he approached the villa, he saw that the riddle was one worth his attention. A man in flying gear emerged from the building, a Frenchman, and, judging from his bearing and his waxed black moustache, he was an officer. At his side was Hussayn, dark and suave. The aviator's face was tense and grim. The Arab was imperturbable, yet there was something about him that suggested a panther ready for the kill, or a hawk about to strike.

"You can take your choice, *Monsieur le Capitaine* Beaufort," murmured Hussayn. "I would really not need to pay you anything for taking my three men to Bagdad and attending to that other matter on your way back. Who will miss

a few bombs—which you might well have dropped on the rebels in Damascus?"

The Arab's suave voice had assumed the soft, steely note of blades meeting in a hissing *glissade*. The captain sensed the deadly hatred of Hussayn for the conqueror, but he was cornered. The master of assassins had intrigued to force him to abandon his post under cover of the uprising. His destination was Bagdad. Flint needed no more to unravel the tangle.

Three were going to Bagdad. The King of Iraq, a Sunni Moslem, would be assassinated by fanatic Ismailian Brethren of the Shiyite sect, and explosives dropped from the bomber would blow up the pipe line.

The murder of Nazar Garabidian now fitted into the picture. British companies owned almost half the stock of the Mesopotamian oil developments; French and American interests between them owned an equal block; and the Armenian's apparently trifling five or ten per cent could shift control toward either major alignment of interests. Garabidian had held the balance of power, but as the result of a bitter quarrel with his colleagues he had turned violently anti-British. His nephew and heir, however, had British sympathies. When this night's *coup* was complete, the Tripoli branch of the double pipe line from Kirkuk would be cut off not only because of the resulting international clash, but because the dead Armenian's stock could now swing the vote of the directorate to that end.

Sanford Wallace's outlaw clique could then regain the French and continental business they had lost because of the pipe line—if, indeed, they could not in the end force the minority interests to sell out.

The jigsaw puzzle pieces fitted, all in a flash. Flint instinctively reached for his pistol. Then he remembered that only two cartridges remained. He could not notify the French authorities without exposing his status as a spy, and without making public what he had learned of Wallace's machinations—and that, at all costs, must be kept secret. The odds were hopelessly against him, but he saw one play ahead.

HE retreated from his listening post, and as he worked back again until he could view the left of the Durand-Falcon, he saw that those who had been draining gas from the tank were vanishing in the further darkness. Hussayn was still talking with Captain Beaufort. That gave Flint his chance, a long and a deadly one, but he had to take it. He deliberately strode into the murky glow of kerosene flares.

He died a hundred times during those fleeting seconds that seemed to be age long. There was no shout of alarm or word of mistaken recognition, but as he boarded the plane, he realized that he was trembling violently, and that his stomach was on the verge of rebellion. It was not from the peril he had endured, but from the knowledge that failure, even if he survived it, would everlastingly be followed by the recollection of other moves he might have made.

The bomber would be crowded beyond its capacity. That seemed to explain the removal of excess gasoline, so that it would carry only enough for the six-hundred-mile flight to Bagdad and return. Yet that guess cracked as Flint glanced at the fuel gauge. It indicated a full tank! Something was wrong; but before he could muster a thought, he heard voices and approaching footsteps. He leaped from the cockpit to a locker recessed into a wing. He had scarcely gained cover, when Captain Beaufort and three Arabs boarded the plane. The aviator took the controls. His passengers jammed themselves into the observer's space, and behind it.

"Bon voyage, mon capitaine," said Hussayn. Then he added in Arabic, "Track down that dog of a Sunni. Cut him down from his throne. We will meet in *al Jannat*, O my brethren. Paradise is in the shadow of spears, and the brides of Paradise will smile on you while the traitor to Islam boils everlastingly in the lakes of Jahannum!"

The door slammed shut, and the engine thundered to life as hands outside wheeled the bomber into position. It zoomed sharply upward. Flint relaxed as he realized that the pilot had cleared the wall that inclosed that incredibly cramped, secret landing field. He peeped from the barely cracked door of his hiding place. The Durand-Falcon could make Bagdad in three hours, perhaps less, going in an air line over the Syrian desert.

The three passengers, primed with hasheesh, had swallowed a deadlier drug —"Paradise is in the shadow of spears." If Flint failed in his mission, uncounted thousands of French and British and Americans might hear a similar exhortation, though delivered in terms of making the world safe for this and that.

To risk a hand to hand encounter would be fatal. The third of those drugged and blood-crazed fatalists would cut him to pieces as he used his remaining two cartridges on the first and second. Even if he overcame the three, he would have to reckon with Captain Beaufort, whom Hussayn controlled through threat or blackmail. Knocking the pilot from the controls would be also a futile play, for Flint had never handled a plane, and a bomber over the Syrian desert is no place for a first attempt.

Death was flying toward the golden dome of Kademain at the rate of three hundred and fifty kilometers an hour. Flint ventured a peep at the gas gauge, then at his watch, and took into account the number of tins of essence which had been taken from the tank. That calculation forced him to discard his half-formed plan to emerge from cover on the return from Bagdad, and at the point of a pistol give Beaufort new orders.

There was but one way out, and Flint took that. He flung open the locker door, cursed above the roar of the engine, and commanded, "Make way, Brother! I'm more crowded than you are!"

The three swarthy slayers speared him with staring eyes. They barely heard his voice, but they recognized authority in his face and gesture. Flint had stolen good clothing from that ruined house in Damascus. They made room, jamming together like cigarettes in a pack. The ways of Hussayn were inscrutable, and if he had sent along a lieutenant to supervise them, so be it.

AUDACITY won. That Flint could be other than one of Hussayn's men was inconceivable. If Beaufort perceived the stowaway, he followed like logic—number four was to insure faithful performance.

But it was Flint's amiable smile that won the day. "One of us is bound to succeed," he declared, fingering the haft of the knife he had taken from the *bawwab*.

"If we aren't dashed to pieces dropping from this bird of Satan," growled one of the brethren. To land in Paradise as flat as a sheet of apricot paste was by no means as dramatic as being cut down by the guards of the King of Iraq.

"*Wallah*, Marouf!" mocked another. "Our friend here has no flying suit—but he's not worried."

That caught Flint between the eyes. Hasheesh-drugged or not, Marouf was observant. It was a bad break, but he grinned, shrugged, and said, "*Billahi!* I'm taking the one that dog of a *Feringhi* is wearing."

"But how do you work the accursed things? What is it that you jerk when you fall out? By God, I prefer a camel!"

"Get a camel for Assad!" mocked Marouf.

Flint explained, though he knew that the fellow understood, and merely wanted reassurance. Then he set about readjusting Assad's pack, saying, "I know all about these things. It's perfectly safe provided nothing is tangled."

One by one they submitted to superior knowledge. While Flint was no pilot, he did know a few things about parachute packs. That established him as protector and leader of the trio who were to remove a king and enter Paradise. That done, he approached the pilot

and shouted into his ear, "Give me your pack, captain—I forgot mine."

The captain was outnumbered; and a man who could land a Durand-Falcon in a Syrian garden would not quibble about parachutes. Thus Flint was soon equipped. Presently, he saw the domes of Kademain, gleaming in the night.

The captain gestured and shouted. It was time to go over the side. He could not risk flight over Bagdad. The assassins crowded toward the door. Flint roared the final instructions as to falling clear before jerking the release. One by one, they plunged into the night, piously ejaculating, *"El humdu lilahi."* —In the name of Allah.

But only Allah could untangle their hopelessly disordered parachutes. Flint for a moment stared grimly into the black void.

"Too bad that Paradise isn't in the shadow of spears to-night," he muttered. Then he leaped clear . . . but his parachute opened. As he fell, he saw swooping black wings again blot out the stars. Beaufort was swinging westward, but lack of gas would force him down, long before he reached the Syrian border. Flint now understood the partially drained tank and the doctored fuel gauge; and his mission was in Bagdad rather than in a plane stranded in the northern desert.

He landed not far from two shapeless things that lay sprawled in the gloom. He was glad that it was dark, and he did not look for the third. Then, untangling himself from his parachute, he set out on foot across the wastes, dashing toward the city of the caliphs as fast as he could run. There was still a chance to save the Kirkuk pipe lines.

CHAPTER IV

Flower of Death

As Flint headed for the broad, sluggish Tigris, it seemed that he was plunging into a black waste which was swallowing up his objective—and his hopes at the same time. He was resigned to exposing his identity to prevent an international tangle which would inevitably be traced to Sanford Wallace's intriguing with Ismailian fanatics. If he did not reach the British Resident in time, he would be stranded in Mesopotamia and the presence of an American secret agent eventually would be revealed, and to no purpose.

Finally, with what breath he had left having been hammered from him by repeated stumblings in the dark, he reached the customs station at the edge of the canal. An Iraqi soldier challenged him.

"Take me to the British Resident—the High Commissioner—anyone in authority!" he demanded in Arabic.

The soldier called the corporal of the guard, and between them they carefully searched Flint for cocaine and hasheesh. They were convinced that the poor fellow must be mad, expecting to interview a British official at that impossible hour. But since madmen are favored of Allah, their wits having been taken to Paradise in advance of their bodies, Flint was not summarily thrown into the guardhouse. He dashed across the Maude Bridge, refreshed by his enforced pause.

A native official was there to receive him. Another stormy exchange of Arabic followed.

"Allah, by Allah, and again by Allah, I'll kill you with my bare hands!" fumed Flint. His pistol had been confiscated by the guard. "Let me see the *Sahib* Inspector!"

Absolutely not, the official said stubbornly. But the riot finally did rout out the inspector. He was sleepy and wrathful. Then his eyes became blue saucers when Flint said in English, "For God's sake, get me some action—before the Kirkuk pipe line's blown out of the earth!"

There was a miniature explosion then and there, on the banks of the Tigris. Even a madman speaking fluent English can get results with such a remark. Things moved. Presently Flint was surrounded by a cluster of colonels and civilian officials.

"Go out there in the sticks and find

the three lads I sent over the side with tangled parachutes. Hell, no, colonel, of course I've got no papers. Listen—and I'll give you the story."

It was most incredible. Most extraw'nary, in fact, the Britishers decided. But they got it. They radioed Haditha and every patrol along the six hundred miles of steel serpent that winds across Iraq and Syria, warning the air patrols to guard the line.

Leather-faced Colonel Blount-Fortesque did more listening than he had since his days as a shavetail.

"Get me to Damascus," Flint demanded. "I've got to nail the man who started that. And I've got to get back there before the news of my trick breaks out!" Flint had to seize Wallace, himself. A British or French arrest of this American would cause ruinous complications.

"But, my dear fellow," marveled Blount-Fortesque, "your entry into Iraq was highly irregular. I'll have to radio Washington. I'll have to—"

"Nuts!" Flint exploded. "You'll have to take me to Damascus. Damn it, didn't I risk my neck to keep three Ismailians from taking a crack at the King of Iraq? You've heard of the riots in Damascus—"

"Well, rather," the colonel managed to put in. "You'd be amazed at what I heard. Nevertheless—"

"And whether those three natives had succeeded, or not, there'd have been the devil to pay—"

Blount-Fortesque admitted that there would have been.

"So cough up with some British sportsmanship." Flint was pleading desperately, now. "I've given you a break, and I need one. I've got to nail the instigator of the revolt before France does, and makes a *cause célèbre* and an international mess of it! Right?"

"Er . . . ah, what I mean, Mr. Flint—"

"You mean you don't believe a word I'm telling you?"

Colonel Blount-Fortesque decidedly had his doubts, even though he did sense that something unusual was in the wind. Before he could find words, an orderly burst into the official presence to report, "We found those three niggers all flattened out. Each had a red belt and a knife and the rest of the costume this gentleman describes them as wearing in Damascus."

BLOUNT-FORTESQUE did not digest the next orderly's report as easily. Three bombs, dropped from a fast-flying plane, had utterly demolished the valve houses and booster stations at Haditha, where the French and British branches fork! The Falcon-Durand bomber had been recognized, and was heading for Syria. Patrols were pursuing, but with no success.

The colonel turned the color of an old saddle when Flint exploded, "If you hadn't stalled so long, you might have save it! Now, get me to Damascus. You've got to break up this murderous mess and avoid a clash. The French Government isn't responsible, and you British will have plenty of trouble if the center of the disturbance isn't blotted out. And I'm the one who can do it—nobody else. Do I go to Damascus or do I not?"

"You do," admitted Blount-Fortesque; and he issued an order.

Before Flint boarded a British plane, he extracted a promise. The colonel had to agree not to have agents follow him, or to make official use of his story for twenty-four hours. At the end of that time, if he did not hear from Flint, he was at liberty to make whatever use he wished of the sealed directions the American agent handed him.

The sun was rising when a British plane landed outside of Damascus. Flint had learned by radio that the Durand-Falcon had been found in the desert fifty miles east of the Syrian border. The gas tank was empty. The French pilot, realizing how he had been betrayed by Hussayn, had used his pistol to good advantage on his British captors, in trying to escape. But for Flint's explanation to the British, that grounded plane would have caused war.

On his arrival, Flint found that—for the time being—Damascus was pacified. Senegalese and Foreign Legion troops patrolled the streets. The square blossomed with fresh gallows and new bodies. The French thought they had the situation in hand, but Flint knew otherwise. Sanford Wallace was still at large; yet for the moment, he would not be active, and neither would Hussayn. They would be waiting for word of the discovery of the Durand-Falcon in the desert, and the assassination of the King of Iraq, right on the heels of French assurance to the British to the effect that there were not and never had been any Ismailian assassins in Damascus.

As Flint set out for the villa north of Damascus, his task seemed nearly at an end. He had only interview Wallace, get him clear of his bodyguard, jam a pistol to his ribs and march him to the American consulate to be booked on a charge of embezzlement, then smuggled out of Syria before there could be any leaks.

It had to work out that way. He doubted if Aline Clayborne had put him under suspicion with Wallace. Hussayn's plot had seemingly gone through without a hitch, so that there would be no real occasion for her to point the finger of suspicion at Flint.

There was a new *bawwab* at the entrance of the estate. It was quite improbable that the absence of the other had as yet been considered permanent. But when Flint was ushered into Wallace's presence, he saw that the single-handed arrest of the oil pirate would require maneuvering. Hussayn was also there, and with him were half a dozen native *askaris*, ostensibly to protect the house against the possibility of fresh outbreaks in Damascus.

Despite Wallace's cordial greeting as he arose from behind the desk, that collection of guards made a jarring note in the Arabian reception hall. Flint sensed the tension that pervaded the room. He was certain that his arrival had been expected with eagerness far in excess of his outward merits. Hussayn returned his salute with calm gravity, but the Arab sat on the cushioned *mastaba* near Wallace's desk as though he were a crouching panther.

Something was wrong. The *askaris* were fingering the butts of their pistols and the hafts of their *khanjars*.

"So you found your way back, eh, Sawân? You should have stayed here last night," Wallace said genially.

"For a while, it did seem that that would have been wise," admitted Flint. "But I dug in at Salahiyeh and dodged the worst of the rioting."

Just then, the radio at the further side of the *majlis* came to life, picking from the air a press dispatch from Bagdad. The bombing of the Kirkuk pipe line was being broadcast from one end of the earth to the other. Flint did not miss the glance that passed between Wallace and Hussayn; but the continuation of the news flash left Flint as numb as if he had been bludgeoned on the head.

"Early this morning, three assassins broke through the line of sentries and stabbed the King of Iraq while at sunrise prayer. The three slayers, identified as belonging to the Ismailian sect that has been terrorizing Damascus, were cut down by the guard—"

"El hamdulilahi!" was Hussayn's pious ejaculation. "Praise be to Allah, the oppressor and traitor is dead!"

WHILE that incredible news flash cleared Flint of any possible suspicion concerning his movements of the night just past, it brought the world crashing down about his ears. It was with difficulty that he maintained his composure. And then he saw that the effort was wasted.

At Hussayn's gesture, a wall hanging parted. Flint saw that he was trapped, regardless of news from Bagdad. Four *askaris* covered him with leveled rifles, and those near Hussayn were advancing to seize him. This was one hand which bluff could not win. Wallace and the Arab had stacked the deck.

"Perhaps," was Hussayn's ironic comment, "you can restrain your impatience long enough to explain a few things to

us, Mr. Flint. Haroun Sawân did very nicely, but there are certain discrepancies that perplex us."

Native *askaris* are wretched marksmen, but the range was too close to permit Flint the shadow of a chance to reach for his pistol, go out blazing and take Wallace with him. The news of the murder of the King of Iraq had for the moment numbed him beyond desperation. Foresighted Hussayn must already have had assassins aplenty in Bagdad.

"You might try your own hand at explanation," countered Flint as deft fingers plunged the pistol from his concealed holster. But his voice sounded hollowly in his ears. The very way he carried his automatic damned him as an American. "Wallace—what's the meaning of this outrage?"

"A matter of pomegranate blossoms," interposed the Arab, before Wallace could answer. "Miss Clayborne finally became candid with us. And you are alive now only because we wish to give you a chance to tell us who you represent. That done—well, we shall see."

Flint knew, then, that he would see no more than red flame spurting from the muzzles of four rifles; nor would they delay until sunrise. Red flowers blossom at any hour in the garden of death.

Hussayn, crafty as he was, did not realize that he had betrayed his own subtlety in mentioning Aline in connection with pomegranate blossoms. That was one thread of the tangle which she could not have revealed, whatever else she might have said. For she had no knowledge of Flint's trick with the red flower, that night. Hussayn was groping, seeking to trick him into an admission.

Flint realized all this, and despite his peril, fresh life raced through his viens. There was a chance to temporize—a chance to keep the Arab on edge concerning the nonexistent conspirators he suspected.

"Why not ask her some more?" countered Flint. "Pomegranate blossoms mean nothing to me."

"They will mean much before my men are through with you," was the sinister rejoinder. "You will live for some time after they have stripped half the hide from your body. And if that sharpens your perceptions sufficiently for you to give me a suitable answer, some one might be induced to shoot you."

Hussayn was not bluffing; and Flint knew that he could expect no consideration from Wallace, sitting there chewing a cigar stump. Wallace was worried. He winced at the soft-voiced savagery of his ally's threat, but he would not intervene.

The duplication of pomegranate blossoms the night of the Armenian's death was ample cause for the conspirators to be concerned; but Flint was perplexed that suspicion should now center on him, regardless of what Aline might have said. Had the assassins recognized him at Bab ash-Sharqa, he would not have lived to leave Wallace's villa and stow away on the plane for Bagdad. Then what had slipped since then?

It was clear that Wallace and his prime minister were groping. Flint's life depended on successful temporizing. Gain time. Trick the Arab to approaching another pace. Catch him off guard. Seize him and use him as a shield to block the fire of his own men. It was desperate, but nevertheless, a chance.

IT all flashed through his mind in an instant; and as the Arab's eyes probed Flint's face to catch his reactions to the threat, the American grinned mirthlessly, and said, "You might tell me what this pomegranate proposition is about. Possibly, I could give you a better answer."

His face was half-quizzical, half-apprehensive as he added, "And tell those *askaris* to lower their rifles. I'd much rather be clubbed to death than mangled with their rotten marksmanship."

Hussayn stroked his chin. He did not quite know whether he was dealing with a madman, or a fatalist, or an uncommonly stubborn person. Flint's sour mockery piqued him.

"Tell me who sent you to Bab ash-Sharqa with a red flower on your lapel —and Allah will make your death easy."

The distance was still too great for a lunge, even though the Arab had swayed forward as he put his question.

"Look to your real enemies, Hussayn," taunted Flint. "Or are you frightened and nervous? Would I have returned this morning if I had this troublesome matter of pomegranate blossoms on my mind? Whose wife has been flirting in the bazaar and giving token to her lovers?"

The mockery failed to draw Hussayn into an explanation that would give Flint another play. The Arab clapped his hands. A native stepped from the passageway that pierced the wall just beyond Wallace's desk. It was the waiter who had been on duty at Aline's table the night she had sent Garabidian to his doom. Even before the fellow spoke, Flint knew that his slender hope had vanished.

"That's the man, *ya sidi!*" he exclaimed. "*Wallah,* the very one I described, then wearing *Feringhi* dress. He heard her give Mayar the directions, and saw her put the token on him. He went ahead, before the infidel dog set out for Bab ash-Sharqa."

Hussayn smiled thinly. "Is it possible, Mr. Flint, that some other person wearing dinner clothes could have gone to Bab ash-Sharqa just in advance of the Armenian, and armed with a pistol of the same kind as we just took from you? The ejected cartridges lying in Derb al Mustakim are strangely like those in your weapon. Your life is required as blood indemnity for the Ismailians you shot down. But you will live all too long, if you do not tell me who betrayed their plans so that you could profit by watching Aline Clayborne.

"Who was it that forgot to tell you that the Armenian would be intercepted before—not after—he reached Bab ash-Sharqa? What careless informer omitted to explain that those waiting at the gate were there to deflect possible witnesses or French patrols? Or are you a prophet, and did you guess the meaning of a flower pinned to an Armenian's coat?"

Flint said nothing. To tell how he had observed Aline receive a message at Sûk al Qamli would only put her in the same mortal danger that he faced. The Arab's questioning proved that she had not mentioned his rifling of her room; and regardless of her complicity in the death of Garabidian, Flint could not sentence her to a fate worse than the one from which he had saved her when revolt swept Damascus.

"Still stubborn?" murmured Hussayn. Then he signaled to the *askaris* and barked a command. They set aside their rifles, and drew knives. One snatched a coil of cord and advanced to bind Flint as the Arab resumed, "Your skin will make excellent leather, my friend . . . "

Flint was hemmed in with a hedge of blades. Strong hands gripped his arms. There was not even the chance of deliberate, suicidal resistance. They would not kill him. They would batter him unconscious and set to work when he regained his wits.

Wallace was weakening. "Get it over!" he interposed. "When this fellow's out of the way, it'll make no difference how he got his information. If he had enough to do him any good, he'd not have come back, would he?"

Before Hussayn could give the *askaris* their final order, the hangings that screened the passageway again parted. Aline, pale and disheveled, ran into the room. Wallace's grim face became blank with dismay. Hussayn's eyes narrowed to venomous points of fire. They both realized that she had heard and knew what fate Flint faced. There was but one antidote.

"What the devil are you doing here?" demanded Wallace. "Why do you suppose I told you to remain in your room?"

"I brained your nigger guard with a vase!" she flared. "You unspeakable assassin! You—"

FLINT read the sentence that blazed in Hussayn's eyes, and saw the glance that passed between him and Wallace.

"Get out!" he yelled. Aline's arrival had distracted the *askaris* who gripped his arms, and slackened their vigilance. He wrenched clear of their detaining grasp, hoping by his outcry and sudden plunge to center attention on himself, and give Aline a chance to retreat before she, too, was seized for execution. But as he hurled himself against the wall of brawn and drooping blades, he saw that he had misjudged the girl.

As Hussayn leaped forward to snatch her, she made no effort to avoid him. Her hand darted to her breast and reappeared with an automatic pistol. The Arab, blinded by the flame that poured from the tiny weapon, recoiled and clawed at his eyes. Wallace yelled, tried to leap to his feet, but slumped back into his chair. He clutched his chest as though to pluck out the slugs which had riddled him.

Then Flint's shoulder rammed through the circle of startled *askaris* who had been disorganized by the succession of surprises. He smashed headlong against Wallace's desk, bearing with him the three who had received the full shock of his charge. Hussayn, still blinded, howled a command. The remainder of the shattered circle closed in, knives ready to hack the infidel from the tangle of limbs and bodies that flailed and threshed on the floor.

The charge sent Aline crashing into a corner, her pistol skating across the tiles; but she had scarcely landed, when her hand flashed toward a wall niche. Hussayn ducked the glass bowl of a *narghileh* which she hurled. It missed him, but spattered to shards against another turbaned head, just as Flint, struggling to his knees, emerged from the bottom of the heap.

He was cut and battered, but he had seized a curved *khanjar* early in the charge. He slashed upward as he emerged, ripping an *askaris* with the razorlike blade, battering a swarthy face to red pulp with a backward sweep of the heavy handle, parrying a cut, kicking clear of a detaining arm—

The blast of Hussayn's pistol seared his face, but it did not check him. Before the Arab could shift his weapon to correct the poor aim of his smarting eyes, Flint, in his turn half blinded, ploughed home. He felt his knife sink to the hilt. He heard the renewed spiteful chatter of a light automatic. It stopped before it fairly started. Then a mad confusion of yells followed. There was a scream—and a crushing, pounding, slashing avalanche of bodies and blades poured over him as he struggled to jerk his *khanjar* from Hussayn's ribs.

Another scream followed a crash of glass. Damn fool girl, why didn't she check out? Blades were probing the confusion, and fists were a futile substitute for steel. The world was a blood-drenched, fatal confusion, and cuts were becoming painless . . .

Then, as from a great distance, Flint heard the crashing of wood and the roar of heavy pistols. Dead weight pinned him to the wet floor as he sought to kick clear. And when he finally felt the crushing weight shift from him, a strong hand plucked the red blade from his hand as he blindly slashed.

It was only then that he saw that the new arrivals were French officers, and men in plain clothes. Their pistols still fumed. Aline was bedraggled, but seemingly none the worse for running afoul of the backslash of the battle. Sanford Wallace sat with head slumped forward, blood drooling from his lips and joining the blood that made a red acre of his shirt front. Having been at the bottom of the heap, Flint had escaped being shot down or battered senseless by the French officers' mistaken zeal.

Before the French captain had fairly helped him to his feet, Flint slipped out of the tattered remains of his *djellah* and flung it over Sanford Wallace's face.

"Leave it that way," he demanded. "Until I explain."

"I'll see that they do," Aline's voice assured him from beyond the blackness that made him grope for support.

HOURS later, Flint learned that Aline had made good her promise. He was still in Sanford Wallace's villa. Aline was at his side, and her shadowed eyes lost their anxiety as he sat up, blinked, and demanded a drink and an explanation.

"I am working for France," she began without hesitation. "My first attempt at free-lancing. It started in the States. Wallace's activities had aroused suspicion in Europe. We had nothing on him. Despite my being his secretary, I was pretty well sidetracked when he came to Damascus. Seldom entered this house. I went to Sûk el Qamli to get my orders, but they were so noncommittal that I made no progress. Giving Garabidian the instructions I did seemed only in keeping with Wallace's secretiveness.

I thought it was just another conference. I never imagined it was leading up to murder. I didn't realize the state of affairs until I was locked up last night, after you left, and kept under guard.

"And I didn't tell him about you. Good Lord, did you think I'd sell you out after what you did for me? I broke loose to try to save—"

"Skip that," chuckled Flint. "Giving Wallace the works proves you're All-American—and a crack shot with crockery. But how about this French raid that saved our necks?"

"When you searched my room, I suspected you, and reported it to French headquarters. But that was before you saved me from the mob," she added quickly. "Since Wallace sidetracked me, I thought he was having me watched. So I spent a lot of time in the room across the hall, waiting for snoopers. That burned message you so carefully pocketed was spy bait.

"Anyway, the rioting kept the authorities from catching up with you at once. And I had no chance to tell them that my suspicions were wrong. They trailed you this morning, and instead of detaining you, they waited to follow you from Wallace's house and find out whose go-between you were. Then the shooting brought them in."

That cleared up the tangle. Flint knew, now, that his efforts to get Wallace out of Syria without a disturbance had been hopeless from the start; yet this particular disposal of him had prevented an international clash. Then Flint recollected the radio news flash.

"Good God!" he groaned. "The King of Iraq—in spite of everything—"

"My dear fellow," boomed a hearty voice from just beyond the door. "His Majesty's death was vastly exaggerated."

Colonel Blount-Fortesque was at the threshold. "That false alarm was to keep the conspirators assured of their success and thus deflect possible suspicion from you," he continued.

"Great idea, colonel," Flint applauded. Then, with a wry grin that was half masked by bandages, he added, "I thought you gave me your word as an officer and a gentleman you wouldn't follow me for twenty-four hours."

"But I assure you, Mr. Flint," protested Blount-Fortesque, "I wasn't following you—really. I flew from Bagdad to express the gratitude of His Majesty the King of Iraq, and to offer you my own congratulations—"

"Tell the king he's quite welcome." The American agent looked uncomfortable. "But suppose you see me some time this evening, colonel, and maybe you'll really have something to congratulate me about, eh, what, old chap?"

"In view of your facility for arranging things," the colonel remarked, looking pointedly at Aline, "I can see no harm in taking a few things for granted."

As Blount-Fortesque's spurs click-clicked down the hall, Flint turned to Aline and said, "Are you going to make a monkey of me in front of that Limey colonel—or are you going to quit free-lance spying from now on?"

"I've had my fill of lone-hand espionage," Aline admitted. "But with your trick of being a native and a white man, marrying you will seem an awful lot like bigamy!"

The M-P News Flash

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Take Your Pick

HERE'S your chance to get either a beautiful gold-filled Zodiac ring, bearing the sign of the universe under which you were born, or a genuine Winchester pocket knife ABSOLUTELY FREE! In case you decide upon a ring, we will send you free of charge an astrological reading, indicating your characteristics, tendencies, capabilities, etc.

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There will be three contests, of which this is the first. For the best letters entered in each contest, the following prizes will be awarded: First prize, $50.00; second prize, $25.00; third prize, $10.00; fourth prize, $5.00. In addition, there will be ten prizes of $1.00 each. The judges will consist of a board comprised of editors of M-P magazines, and their decisions will be final. In case of a tie, duplicate awards will be made.

The few simple rules governing the contests are:

1. Your letter must not exceed 500 words; you are to write plainly and on one side of the paper only. (Copies of the magazines involved are available at all newsstands. In many cases they will be found on file in public libraries.)
2. You are to print or write your name and complete address on the first page of your letter.
3. This contest is open to all, with the exception of employees of MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS, INC., and members of their families.
4. Letters to be considered must be received at this office not later than 5:00 P. M., May 15th.

The names of winners will be printed in this magazine. Remember, $300.00 is waiting to be won, and you stand just as good a chance as anyone. THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY! ENTER TODAY!

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If you're interested in GOOD READING, and are really looking for the best in entertainment at a minimum cost, you'll thank us for telling you that . . . . WESTERN TRAILS leads off the current issue with three tophand tale-spinners—Frederick C. Davis, T. W. Ford and Clyde A. Warden . . . . that TEN DETECTIVE ACES—the biggest newsstand value in detective fiction, 10 stories for 10c.—tops the list with Frederick C. Davis, Carl McK. Saunders, Emile C. Tepperman, and seven other aces . . . . that LOVE FICTION MONTHLY is brimful of pulsating novels, novelettes and short stories of romance by such writers as Judith MacKay, Florence Eberhard, Mary Francis Doner, Peggy Gaddis, and others . . . . that SECRET AGENT "X" comes like a bombshell each month, loaded with mystery, adventure and super-thrills, with the leading character a man of a thousand faces, a thousand disguises and a thousand surprises . . . . that FLYING ACES, the greatest buy in the aviation field—represents three magazines in one—A Model Building Magazine—an Aviation Fact Magazine and an Aviation Fiction Magazine—all for 15c. . . . . that SKY BIRDS gives you air stories by real airmen—Arch Whitehouse, Donald E. Keyhoe, Major George Fielding Eliot—and every story is packed with action, adventure, thrills . . . . that SPY STORIES and SPY NOVELS, the two new magazines of mystery, intrigue and romance, crowded with thrilling spy stories of men and women who play the dangerous, deadly game of international espionage. These two magazines are different and amazing! Try them all and you'll agree with us that they're nine great magazines—each without an equal!

AMBASSADOR OF DEATH

Complete Spy Novel

By FREDERICK C. PAINTON

Author of "Web of Intrigue," etc.

The door burst open, and a girl looked upon that scene of murder. "Just stand where you are!" she commanded, her gun pointing straight at them.

Only Barney Trale would have tried to set up a new king in the smouldering Balkans—for it was part of his grim work to face the daily threat of the firing squad. This time, his one slim chance for success lay in his playing the lone hand he had always played. Yet now Washington had forced him to take a woman on his secret mission—an American woman who was to lead him into the jaws of an enemy trap.

CHAPTER I

THE two events occurred simultaneously, and if anything, the knock at the door preceded the sharp jangle of the telephone. Barney Trale, ace trouble-shooter of the United States diplomatic Secret Service, unhinged his long, powerful body from the depths of the chair and frowned. He had expected the telephone call, but not a visitor. Only Davigny was supposed to know where he hid out in Paris.

"If it's the police, Neetch," he muttered, "stall 'em."

He lifted the receiver from the old-fashioned wall telephone. A female voice said, in French, "Durazzo, Italy, calling Captain Barney Trale at the Hotel Château Frontenac, Rue Montabour. Is this Captain Trale?"

"Yes," said Trale. "Put the call through."

A moment later, he heard a familiar, urgent voice. "General Ravinov, Captain Trale. I flew to Durazzo to call you."

"Yes," rejoined Trale. "Why?"

"King Orliv is suspicious. Some one in Paris is warning him. We dare not wait longer. Wednesday there is a peasant festival to celebrate the feast of St. Stephen, and we have decided to rise then. The people are ready and so is the army. We have distributed the rifles you sent. We are sure of success if John Carloff is here to seize the reins of power. But he must be here by noon, Wednesday. Can you bring him?"

Barney Trale thought quickly. If King Orliv, the dictator of Dalmatia, was suspicious of revolt, then thousands of lives depended on delivering the commoner, John Carloff, idol of the Dalmatian masses, on time. Even if it gave Trale but thirty-six hours, it would have to be arranged some way.

In retrospect, he reviewed the strenuous circumstances of the past four months. To begin with, the Balkan country of Dalmatia owed the United States thirty million dollars. Since the country was developing and using much raw material, such as the United States manufactured, Washington had been lenient about the debt. But within the year, since King Orliv had abolished parliament and created a dictatorship, Dalmatia had not only ignored requests for interest payment, but had flatly refused to use a ten-million dollar credit fund set up in the United States to make purchases. Instead, King Orliv was buying heavily from Germany—and some said from France. He was carrying on a campaign against the United States.

For these reasons alone, as Barney Trale knew, Orliv had to be ousted. When he was found to be a friend of Hitler, a believer in the Nazi ideas, it was doubly certain that he must be removed. But, finally, the fact that he had seized oil wells and machinery belonging to American oil concerns, without a cent of payment, was what made the powers-that-be send Barney Trale to work.

The future of American business relations in the Balkans depended on proving that those who flouted the United States didn't last long. Millions of dollars of trade per year in other countries besides Dalmatia depended upon that.

It was Barney Trale who decided that John Carloff should be the next president of Dalmatia. It was Trale who engineered the preparations for a revolt to turn out the dictator who, it was said, murdered fifty political enemies a day. John Carloff, son of an American mother and a Dalmatian father, was a liberal; he believed in the United States and its ideals—and in doing business.

So now, after long preparations, the time had come to strike. It had come earlier than Barney had planned, but somehow he must deliver the savior of Dalmatia.

"I'LL get Carloff out of here to-morrow noon, by plane," he promised.

"Thank God!" A sigh came over the wire. "The people worship Carloff. Even if he is half-American, they trust him to save them from an infamous dictatorship. But if you fail, Orliv will have a blood purge."

"Don't repeat," growled Trale. "Do you want him at Zara?"

"Yes. Two of my own regiments are stationed there, and they will form his bodyguard. The march on the palace will begin at noon."

"Right," said Trale.

"Have a care, *monsieur*," came General Ravinov's uneasy voice. "I have it on assured authority that Germany is opposing the return of John Carloff. It is her secret agents in Paris who have warned Orliv. France herself is not in

favor of a change in the *status quo.*"

"Watch your angles and leave me to mine," said Trale.

He hung up the receiver, frowning, and turned to find the small, weasel-like Neetch standing there, staring at him.

"Well?" said Trale.

"It's a twist—a girl," Neetch explained in his whiny voice. "Says her name is Marjorie Storm, and you know about her."

Barney Trale scowled and went to the closet for his topcoat and hat. "Damn!" he muttered. "More of Washington's interference." He slipped the coat over his double-breasted dinner jacket. He transferred a small Webley automatic to the top-coat pocket.

"Women in this racket," he grumbled, fishing for his gloves, "are just a detour sign leading to a road full of trouble."

"If you was to ast me," said Neetch imperturbably, "I'd say she was a swell-lookin' dame—curves thisaway and thataway, and eyes like bay windows."

Trale shrugged. "Don't get poetical on me. Oh, well," he broke off, "bring her in."

Neetch moved away noiselessly and without the appearance of motion. It was a method of locomotion he had developed when he had turned sneak-thief at the age of twelve. Barney Trale employed him ostensibly as valet and chauffeur because Neetch was priceless in opening safes and could frisk a room thoroughly and never leave a pin out of its original place.

Barney Trale remembered the cablegram about the girl, and went to his dispatch case and got it. He poured himself a quick Scotch and soda, and while he drank, he again glanced over the decoded message, which read:

"DUE TO INCREASING GRAVITY EUROPEAN SITUATION WE ARE AUGMENTING PARIS BUREAU STOP SENDING YOU MARJORIE STORM STOP TWENTY THREE EDUCATED SPEAKS FIVE LANGUAGES RIDES SHOOTS AND DOES NOT SCARE STOP HAS PLENTY OF WHAT IT TAKES TO MAKE MEN TALK STOP KNOWS RISKS AND YOU CAN USE HER ON CARLOFF COUP."

The cable was signed by Rodney Taylor, chief of the Department of State's South-European division. It was an order, and Barney Trale knew it, but he frowned just the same. He put back the cable, took a sip of the drink and watched the girl come across the room.

She wasn't bad, he had to admit. She had height and slimness, and square little shoulders that gave her dignity. Her face was clear and fresh-skinned, with full red lips, big dark eyes that smouldered and made for beauty. But the face also had intelligence and character which made you substitute the better word attractive for the first impression of prettiness.

"I'M just going out," said Trale, coldly. "Make yourself at home. There's whiskey, and here are cigarettes."

He put his polished top hat on his head and slanted it rakishly with a firm tap of the palm. She gave him a quick scrutiny, and calmly poured herself a drink. She picked up a cigarette and lit it, holding the cigarette like a man.

"Thanks," she said coolly. Her voice was low and musical.

Barney Trale pulled on his chamois gloves. "I'm afraid," he said, "I won't be able to find work for you. Later—"

"You shouldn't scowl so," she interrupted. "You're really too good-looking. And you don't look like the famous Barney Trale. You look more like a college half-back. Why don't you comb your hair straight back instead of parting it on the side?"

Barney Trale buttoned his coat. "When I want lessons from you on how to dress up, I'll let you know," he said. "And keep that line for somebody who goes for it."

He walked half-way across the sizeable living room. "I said there wasn't anything for you—"

"The truth is I'd be of a great deal of help to you with John Carloff," she cut in, "if you weren't trying to pretend to hate women."

"Lady, it's no pretense." Trale shrugged himself into his coat and made

ready to go out. "A good many men in this racket are pushing up daisies because the woman assigned to them fell in love with the sucker she was supposed to frame."

"You just try to be rude, don't you?" she said. "You—"

Her voice stopped abruptly and she stiffened as her stare went swiftly past Trale to the opened window. In the sudden silence, her gasp was sharp. Trale's back was to the window, but his hand streaked into his coat. Neetch, who had just entered, was quicker. He flashed a short-snouted automatic and prepared to shoot.

The man who entered by the window quailed and leaped to one side.

"*Sacré Dieu!*" he cried. "Do not fire."

Barney Trale whirled, saw who it was, and quickly knocked aside the muzzle of Neetch's gun.

"You shouldn't be gunning the future vice-President of Dalmatia," Trale reproached him with a laugh.

"Why's the beaver comin' in through the window, then?" growled Neetch.

"There's something in that, *Monsieur* Davigny," said Trale, grinning. "Why did you come in through the window?"

Boris Davigny was a tall man, very thin everywhere except across his stomach, which protruded as if he had shoved a pillow under his vest. He wore a spade-shaped beard as black as dye could make it, and he had small eyes that deeply glittered. He was very nervous. With trembling hands, he took off his hat.

"That," he said, pointing to a hole in the black felt. "I hope I never come that close to St. Peter's gates again until my time has come."

Trale perceived that the bullet had entered through the brim a hair's breadth from Davigny's skull.

"Police?" he asked

"No." Davigny shivered. "Erich von Krieger!"

"The devil you preach!" muttered Trale, startled. "I thought he was in Siberia, selling the Russians a bill of arms."

His face brooded as he weighed this new consideration. Erich von Krieger went about the world ostensibly as a munitions salesman for the great Krupp munitions works. He sold rifles and cannon, machine guns and bombs. But he was also, as Trale knew from experience, one of the most astute secret agents in German Intelligence.

"HE has come back," Davigny was saying. "The Germans have sent him to stop you. King Orliv has promised Krupp to buy five million kronen worth of arms. That, alone, would influence von Krieger. But Germany is opposing John Carloff because Carloff hates the Nazis."

Trale nodded impatiently. He was familiar with all this. Before he had left for Europe, Rodney Taylor had said, "Barney, if Orliv throws his weight with the Nazis, the United States doesn't collect its Dalmatian loans. Our oil companies do not get back their petroleum concessions, and Nazidom extends into the Balkans. So Orliv goes out and Carloff goes in. Do it your own way, but do it."

Trale's mind came back to the present. "Are you sure?"

"Von Krieger is staying at his place in St. Cloud," Davigny insisted. "He sent for me, to-day, and offered me a million francs to join him."

"And you refused?"

"I, *monsieur*, am a patriot," Davigny said proudly.

Barney Trale grunted. "Let me be the second to congratulate you."

He smoked furiously, flicked the butt into the fireplace and stood with smoke streaming from his nostrils.

"Von Krieger's been tipping Orliv," he said. "And he must be having me watched, if somebody took a shot at you coming here."

"He is a devil." Davigny shuddered. "He thinks no more of murder than I do of blowing my nose." Davigny did so, making a trumpeting sound. "I am afraid of him," he finished frankly.

Barney Trale went to the closet and

returned with a walking stick that sheathed three feet of Toledo steel.

"Ravinov called," he said. "We've got to deliver Carloff in thirty-six hours at Zara."

He paused, and his teeth clicked decisively. "Davigny, you go back to Carloff. Don't let him out of your sight. Keep him in the house. And for God's sake, keep him away from that red-headed woman he's crazy about." He snorted. "Imagine a man with his reputation and importance falling in love at a time like this."

"He loves her." Davigny shrugged. "But I will do what one can. Von Krieger will strike, however. He is the most dangerous man in Europe."

"Leave von Krieger to me," said Trale. "Get going, now, and be ready with Carloff to-morrow noon. A Fokker plane from Orly Field." He paused, then added, "Go out the front door."

Davigny didn't like that, but he went, tipping his bullet-rent hat. The moment the door closed on him, Trale turned to Marjorie Storm, whom he had hitherto ignored.

"There's a job for you," he said. "Tail that man. He'll go to sixteen Avenue Victor Hugo, to Carloff's. Stay outside and watch the house."

She frowned. "You're just trying to get rid of me," she said.

"Shove along," growled Trale. "Take my car—the Renault at the curb."

When she had left, Trale called to Neetch, "Get your hat."

"This von Krieger bozo?" Neetch sprang for his coat and hat with alacrity.

"Old Marshall Foch used to say"—Trale grinned—"that when you are threatened, always attack. The enemy suspects it least, and your attack upsets his plans. And old Foch won a war with that motto."

CHAPTER II

The Balkan Pawn

ERICH VON KRIEGER regarded with some distaste the dark, ratty looking young man who stood so straightly before him with his right hand extended, palm outward, in a Nazi salute.

"Spare me the nonsense," he said wearily. "That does for Hitler, or for the fat Goering. Just relax and tell me what happened."

Von Krieger spoke without lowering his voice. He was in his own country home in St. Cloud, a great château for which he had paid four million francs. Guards watched in the blackness outside; kept vigil near the wrought iron fence. Throughout Europe, other agents kept him precisely informed of the change in the intrigues that he carried on. The greatest agent in the German Secret Service could demand all this and get it—could even obtain immunity from murder.

Von Krieger was not averse to crimes. He had, early in life, studied Nietsche, and decided that most men were peasants and serfs, to die at the beck and call of the strong. He believed that the world had no past and no future, and that only the present counted. People called him ruthless. He was worse than that. He was a man without a conscience. He classified men as insects and killed them as willingly.

He was not a young man, for it is recorded that he laid the foundations of his fortune by selling cast-off Mauser rifles to the Greeks in the last Balkan war. Yet his fifty years did not tell in his appearance. He was short, enormously broad, with a round head that had barely any neck. He shaved his neck, which only accentuated the enormous, overhanging brow, jutting out like the edge of a precipice over deep-set eyes that could outstare most men. A beaky nose hung over full, pouting lips. Below was a heavy, massive chin, made more enormous by a terrace of fat and tremendous jowls.

He had dignity, an ugliness that was fascinating; and he looked what he was, a powerful, unscrupulous man.

The rat-faced one bowed jerkily from the hips. "The shot missed Davigny, *Excellenz,* so we followed him from *Herr* Trale's and drugged him at his home."

"And *Madame* de Tolbert?"

"Sends word that all is arranged."

"*Gut!*" Von Krieger waved the man away.

Alone, he carefully stuffed a cigarette end into a holder that was at least a foot long and touched a match to the end. He finished his absinthe and set his mind to the Balkan problem.

"By keeping Orliv as dictator of Dalmatia," he muttered, "we form the nucleus of a Pan-German alliance." He thought of the American, Barney Trale, but dismissed him as a blunderer. The masses in Dalmatia prayed to John Carloff as they would to God, but a good blood-letting would keep them quiet.

His reflections were interrupted by the quiet opening and closing of a door. He looked up, frowning at this violation of his orders. Then he froze as he saw the tall, top-hatted young man with the gun in his hand. He had seen this dark, hawk-faced man only once, but he knew who it was.

"*Herr Hauptmann* Trale," he muttered.

"Yes," said Trale. "I thought I'd pay you a call."

Von Krieger regarded the gun. "Is that necessary?" He started to retreat to a spot where a buzzer lay under a rug.

"Stand where you are," said Trale curtly. Without turning, he said, "Close the door, Neetch, and take a walk in the next room. See if any more of von Krieger's pets are loafing around."

Von Krieger stood his ground. "One might ask the reason for this call, *Herr Hauptmann.*"

"Sure, and get it. You've stuck your nose into my affairs. Now, I'm putting mine in yours."

BARNEY TRALE came across the room and pocketed the gun. He brought out a handkerchief, and in it was a little round ball of brittle substance. "Hyoscin and ethyl-chloride," he said. "It won't hurt at all."

Von Krieger shrank back. "Why, you fool, you can't do that," he growled. "My guards—"

"Are sleeping all over the place. A hell of a lot of them, too."

Von Krieger gave a start and then relaxed. He laughed mirthlessly. "My dear man, what good does it do to come and threaten me now? I have made my plans. You cannot put Carloff on the throne because—" Suddenly his voice ceased to speak.

With a swiftness unbelievable in such a gross man, his foot flew up in the deadly French foot-kick. It might have killed Barney Trale if it had landed. But he lunged to one side. Von Krieger, caught off balance, turned to run. His voice roared, "*Helfen mich!*"

Swiftly, Barney Trale raced after him, caught him by the shoulder and spun him around. Von Krieger, still yelling, sought to close and grapple. Again, Trale side-stepped. His right arm rose, and a fist slashed out whitely in an overhand blow that had all the driving power of a pivoting body behind its terrific punch. The knuckles made a hollow sound as they exploded against von Krieger's jaw. The German secret agent went down like a felled ox and did not move.

"Scientifically proving," panted Trale, "that a big-jawed guy cannot take it on the chin."

Neetch came in and looked dispassionately on as Trale broke the capsule and held the fumes to von Krieger's face.

"One guy with a rat face," he reported. "He's cold."

"Good," said Trale. "Get an overcoat and hat for this bird."

When the overcoat for von Krieger came, Trale took out a clasp knife and slit the linings of the pockets. They got von Krieger into the coat, then Trale thrust the German spy's hands through the slips and locked them together under the coat with a thin pair of handcuffs. To all outward appearances, von Krieger was simply a man with his hands buried in his pockets. The hat was slapped on.

"Take his other arm," Trale said. "He can walk after that punch wears off."

"Okeh," said Neetch. "But what do we want of this lug?"

Trale grinned. "Principally, to keep him out of trouble. But he's always a good swap in case we have to make a trade."

The German's feet dragged as they practically carried him through the door of the sumptuous room. The hallway, indirectly lighted, showed no one in sight. No one was seen as they made their way to the watch house where the car was. In here were two guards bound hand and foot. Their eyes bulged as they saw von Krieger. Neetch helped stack von Krieger in the rear seat, then climbed in behind the wheel.

"Evreux?" he asked.

"Sure." Trale glanced down at the man he had kidnaped. "He'll be safe enough there for forty-eight hours."

To his amazement, von Krieger spoke —and spoke intelligently, even if in a groggy tone.

"You came too late, *Herr* Trale. My plans are already carried out. Afterwards, for the blow, I shall take—great pains—to kill you. . . ."

Trale bent down, but as if that had been his last effort, the final strength of a powerful man, von Krieger had relaxed and was actually snoring.

"Can you tie that?" marveled Trale.

MARJORIE STORM crouched down on the cushions of the Renault which Trale had assigned to her, and patiently watched the house numbered sixteen. That house, for the moment, sheltered Dalmatia's future president, John Carloff. To be precise, she watched from across the Avenue de Bois de Boulogne. As it happened, there was some sort of a party being given in one of the swank houses of the neighborhood, and her car was lined up with several others. Scrooged down in the rear seat, she went unobserved.

She wasn't very happy, and her fingers squeezed on the small automatic in her lap. She told herself she'd like to drive the muzzle squarely into Barney Trale's acquiline nose.

"He's a rude louse," she muttered, "and I'd like to work somewhere else."

Even as she murmured the words, she knew she was lying. There was something about his big frame, his curt masculinity that stirred her. She knew he was what she always thought a secret agent should be—dogged, driving, clever, and ruthless.

Her train of thought unexpectedly broke as she saw two persons emerge from the shadows of the huge, stone mansion where John Carloff was staying. They had not departed from the façade door, nor yet from the *porte-cochère*. They were hugging the shadows, obviously trying not to be seen, yet attempting to be casual about it. All she was sure of was that one was a man, the other a woman.

They were dressed for the evening. The girl had a fur wrap, and Marjorie noted the sheen of a stiff white shirt bosom on the man.

"Start the motor, Pierre," she said sharply.

The two got into a Rolls Royce standing near the driveway. As they did so, a light flashed on, obviously the dome light, worked automatically by the opening of the door.

"John Carloff!" she breathed, catching a glimpse of a square, kindly face with deep-set eyes. The girl with him was red-headed, and that was all she saw before the light snapped off and the car purred away.

"Follow it, Pierre," she ordered, "but don't be too obvious."

Her sense of excitement grew. There was something wrong, here. Distinctly, she had heard Trale tell Davigny not to leave Carloff, nor to let him out. And the woman—Marjorie had only a vague idea of her, but sensed trouble. That kind of woman lived for trouble.

The lead car swung into the Etoile, down the Champs Elysees to the Avenue Montaigne and then toward the Seine to the Avenue de la Reine. This was a quiet, old aristocratic neighborhood, given over mostly to foreign clubs and a few embassies. The ruby tail-light drew to a halt before a small, exquisitely proportioned house of three stories that

sat well back from the street, yet gave a fine view of the Seine.

"Go on past," she ordered Pierre.

The chauffeur obeyed. She had a momentary glimpse of the tall statesman helping the girl out, and saw them walk up to the ornate entry way and vanish within. She told Pierre to stop, and quickly climbed out.

"Wait here," she called from the sidewalk.

Hugging the shadows of the trees, she advanced to the house where the two had vanished. The question now was what to do about it. Her orders had been merely to watch Davigny; actually, she had disobeyed them in coming this far.

HER quick gaze examined the house. Its walls were sheer, and without ivy or other means of climbing. There were lights only on the second floor. The wind whispered through the trees nearby, but none of the branches was close enough to reach a window.

"Damn!" she muttered.

She debated the matter a moment, and then took her courage in both hands. Her spike heels clicked a refrain of swift movement. She wore an evening gown, a heavy cape, furred at the collar. She could bluff about looking for a party if the worst occurred.

She reached for the bell-pull on the door—but did not pull it. The door was distinctly ajar. She gave it a gentle shove, and it opened silently. Under her wrap, her grip tightened on the small gun. Then she tiptoed within.

The parquet floor held an expanse of fine rugs. In a corner, knight's armor gleamed on a pedestal. From the head of a beautiful, broad staircase, light slanted downward to shed a faint iridescence over the splendor of wealth and taste. There was no human sound, and the silence was such that she could still hear the wind whispering through the trees along the avenue.

She advanced a few more steps. Her heart was thudding swiftly now, drowning all other sound with its beat. A little alcove gave off the hall to the left, and peering within, she espied, on a taboret, a clumsy French telephone set. Her sense of peril was distinctly alive now; her conviction of trouble was positive.

She took three steps toward it—stopped, and stood rigid.

The silence cracked in a thousand bits by a high-pitched yell of pure terror—a man's yell, hoarse, desperate. The faint echo of a pistol shot followed the shout. A woman cried out. Another shot roared louder.

Marjorie broke the grip of terror and raced to the telephone. She gave the number of the Hotel Château Frontenac. The delay seemed unendurable. The silence which now settled was more profound, more sinister because of those hideous sounds.

"Hurry," she whispered, her lips pressed into the mouthpiece, exhaling rather than speaking the word. A short space later, a voice spoke. To her unspeakable relief, it was Barney Trale.

"Marjorie," she whispered. "Sixteen Avenue de la Reine—"

An explosion reverberated loudly, and a bullet spat into the taboret and knocked it from under her hand. "Come," she called, and hurled herself away from it and to the floor. She twisted as she fell and fired blindly, more with the idea of frightening the unknown than with the idea of hitting anything. The light at the head of the white staircase clicked off. Below the stairs was absolute darkness.

A moment later, she heard a murmur of voices up there, a man's voice and a woman's.

"Oh, my God, why did you do it?"

Marjorie could not hear the reply. She got to her knees, unmindful of the fact than an eighty dollar Patou model was a total loss from a rip up the side. She supposed she should stay where she was until Trale came. Instead, she sidled toward the staircase. The voices were louder. A door opened, and a pale rectangle of light gleamed on the wall of the staircase. Leaning against it, Mar-

jorie could see no sign of the person who had shot at her.

Swiftly, now, she went up the stairs, aware of the hissing of the silk dress against her legs, hoping it warned no one. A few yards down a wide, high-ceilinged corridor, a door stood partly ajar. The voices were coming from behind it. She tensed, tightened cold fingers on the butt of the automatic, and stepped quickly through the opened door.

"Just stay where you are," she said.

CHAPTER III

Framed for Murder

JOHN CARLOFF, his face pale and astounded in the saffron light, leaned against the wall. His mouth was open, his eyes staring past the red-headed woman. And she, her magnificent evening gown ripped from the shoulder stood like some beautiful statue. Her red hair shone like bronze under the light. Her heavily mascaraed eyes were dark and deep, yet disfigured now by a horror she could not conceal. The red lips, beautifully shaped, were parted, showing a tiny gleam of white teeth. She, too, was looking down, her fingers clenched into tight fists. Marjorie followed their gaze and saw the dead man.

Her first glance showed her the stiff, white shirt bosom with a splotch of blood on it. The black hole of the bullet was near the white vest, and the edge of the vest had been raveled by its passage. Her gaze went up to the face, and her mouth tightened. The putty gray of the face, with the pores of the skin now so noticeable, was a picture of surprised horror. She forced herself to continue looking.

The man was perhaps forty, semi-bald; and even death had not changed the deep circles of dissipation under the staring, open eyes, as glassy as two grapes. The body was spare, with a fat paunch, and it was clad in expensive broadcloth tails. The legs sprawled wide, and the arms were outflung.

All during this scrutiny, there had been no sound except the heavy breathing. Nor had the two turned, even at her warning. It was as if they were stone images.

Marjorie said, "Who is the dead man?"

Her voice startled herself in that silence. The woman twisted her head. Her gaze rested on the ugly automatic, moved up to Marjorie's face.

"My husband, the *Vicomte* de Tolbert," she said. "John Carloff shot him."

Marjorie felt a coldness creep over her. John Carloff! She perceived the consequences instantly. The police—arrest — publicity. Possibly, influence would save the statesman; but the most vital thing was that instead of flying by plane for a dramatic *coup* to become the leader of a freed Dalmatia, the man would sit in a cell in the Santé prison.

She knew that all of Barney Trale's plans, built step by step for months, were ruined by this one act. And with the whole diplomatic position of the United States in the Balkans involved, as well as oil leases worth millions—well, she felt a little sorry for Barney Trale.

For the first time, she noticed the gun drooping limply from John Carloff's right hand. She went to him, lifted it carefully by the muzzle with a gloved hand, and shook it loose.

Carloff stared at her. The aristocratic dignity of his fine face was marred by sheer bewilderment. "I didn't do it," he muttered. "I found the gun on the floor. I—I just picked it up."

Marjorie held it by the muzzle. "We'll have to wait," she said.

THE silent interlude of ten minutes that followed was the worst Marjorie Storm had ever known. She gasped with relief when from below came the light tap of shoes racing up the staircase. Barney Trale entered the room, breathing swiftly from the stair climb. His glance swept Marjorie, John Carloff, *Madame* de Tolbert, and came to rest on the body.

"Huh," he muttered. "Where'd you get the corpse?"

"*Madame* de Tolbert accuses *Monsieur*

Carloff of shooting her husband," said Marjorie. "I took the gun from his hand."

Trale licked his lips, whistled against his teeth with a sibilant sound. Three strides brought him to the body. He bent down and examined the hole in the stiff shirt front.

"Have the police been called?" he asked.

"No," said Marjorie.

Trale continued with his examination, his skillful fingers rifling the corpse, yet not moving it from its original position.

"Didn't Davigny tell you, *Monsieur* Carloff," he asked harshly, "to stay home under the bed?"

"I have not seen Davigny since mid-afternoon," protested Carloff. He seemed to come out of the daze that had held him.

Trale's glance swept to Marjorie, and she shrugged. "Davigny went to Carloff's house and vanished inside. You didn't tell me to go in with him."

"No," muttered Trale. "I suppose Davigny's colder than a pawnbroker's heart, stuffed in some rat-hole." He looked down at an X-like crimson mark on the corpse's chest. "Careless murder," he said. "Somebody wearing a coat-of-arms ring pushed him."

He examined objects brought from the pockets. "Why did you come here, Carloff?" asked Trale.

The statesman stared at the glorious woman. "She asked me to," he rejoined.

"A married woman!" Trale's lips curled. "You could at least have avoided—"

"I didn't know she was married," cried Carloff unhappily. "She told me her name was Francine Courcelles." He stared at the woman, lips trembling. "I loved her," he muttered. "God help me, I still do."

"We can assume that," said Trale. His glance switched to the woman. "Is what he says true?"

Francine de Tolbert shivered, lifted her head. "I love John Carloff," she said. "I was afraid I would lose him if he knew I was married."

"I see," said Trale. "That fits. Now, how'd she get you to come, *monsieur?*"

His eyes bored into Carloff.

"I had no intention of going out," the Dalmatian said. "Francine came to my house not an hour ago. She was very much upset, indeed violently distressed. She declared she was in trouble—a matter of life and death. She urged me to come with her to help her. She would not tell me what was the matter. She said if I loved her I would come without asking questions."

Trale's eyes still studied the accumulation of objects, and his fingers ran over the cloth of the evening clothes, feeling every inch of it.

"That line always goes big," said Trale. "So what?"

John Carloff shrugged helplessly, then muttered, "We got into her car and were driven here. I remember being puzzled at the time as to how she possessed a key to this house. We entered, and she led me to a room adjoining this." He gestured.

"Did she explain more fully?" asked Trale.

"She told me that a German mad with jealousy had threatened to kill her. She wanted me to take her away with me to Dalmatia. She wanted to know when I was going—the exact date!"

"The hell she did!" Trale lifted his head sharply and stared at *Madame* de Tolbert. "This is beginning to be good. But get on with it."

"While she was talking, the door to the room burst open, and a hatless man" —he pointed to the corpse—"rushed in. He was very excited and pale. He spoke incoherently about at last catching the thief who would steal his most prized possession. I thought it was the jealous German, but Francine cried, 'My husband.'"

TRALE looked disgusted. "The old badger game with its face lifted," he said. "*Madame* de Tolbert, do you work for von Krieger?"

Her deep, dark eyes flashed with despair. "I—" she began.

"Exactly," interrupted Trale. "Well, what next, *Monsieur* Carloff?"

"I tried to talk to the man, explain that there was a mistake. He refused to listen. He ran through a door—that one there—that led to this room. He said he was going to get a pistol and kill both of us. I ran after him, grasping at his arm. He shook me off. He went to that chest of drawers and jerked open the top one. I saw a pistol. He reached for it, and I grabbed for his arm. We struggled. He was strong. He hit me in the face and I went backward and struck my head against something—that lamp base, I think."

He shrugged drearily. "That's all I remember until I opened my eyes, and this man was dead as you see him now, and Francine was sobbing."

"Words and music correct," said Trale. He got up from the floor. His eyes never left Francine de Tolbert's hauntingly beautiful features. "Did you see Carloff kill your husband?"

"No." Her voice was almost inaudible.

"You didn't, by any chance, slip a slug into your husband, yourself?"

"You're mad," she flashed. "I wasn't even in the room when he was shot."

"Then how do you know Carloff did it?" demanded Trale.

She drew a long breath as if preparing to face a terrible ordeal. "They were in the room alone," she said. "No one else was in the house."

It was incriminating, damning, in fact, and Trale knew it. He stared sharply at her. If he knew anything at all of human character, he knew this woman loved Carloff, loved him completely. But if so, why was she giving evidence that would convict him of murder?

A thought occurred to him, and he made a quick circuit of the room, examining the walls carefully. Suddenly he muttered an exclamation and bent over to scrutinize a jagged hole just above the moulding.

"One slug missed," he muttered. "So there was another gun."

"There was the gun that fired at me," said Marjorie.

"Yes." Trale shook his head. "It doesn't make sense. *Madame* de Tolbert alone in there. Carloff and de Tolbert in here, alone. Two shots, one gun. And then you, Marjorie—"

From the front door came the loud clatter of a club drumming on wooden panels.

"Ouvrez!" called a voice. *"Nous sommes les police!"*

Trale's pale gray eyes opened wide. "The police," he muttered. "If nobody called them, why are they here?"

Francine de Tolbert uttered a sobbing cry and buried her face in her hands.

"I see," muttered Trale. "Murder on a time-table. The murder to occur at a specified time, and the police to arrive before Carloff ran away."

Again came the rapid, authoritative pounding. Trale relaxed, lit a cigarette, "Show them up, *madame*," he bowed to the woman. "It's your house."

SHE lifted a face stricken with despair. Suddenly the expression grew cold, impassive. "Of course." She turned, and the tap of her heels resounded on the stairs. Instantly, Trale strolled to John Carloff. "You keep your mouth shut," he rapped, "and say 'yes' when I tell you to."

"But—" began the statesman.

"Shut up!" Trale cut in. He came over to Marjorie. "Give me your handkerchief—and that brooch." He suddenly tore it from its fastenings.

She glared angrily. "Why?"

"Never mind questions."

Trale went to the body, and when he returned to stand beside her, his hands were empty.

He smoked calmly and glanced with curiosity at the two blue-caped *agents de police* who followed *Madame* de Tolbert into the room. Impassive of face, he heard their exclamations, saw them wrest from Marjorie the automatic which she had continued to hold since entering the room. His face grew bleak and sad as they stared at him.

"And who are you, *monsieur?*" asked one.

"I am Barney Trale," he rejoined. "If you require any further information about me, it is obtained at the Foreign Office."

Their attitude changed. "And you, *mademoiselle?*" this of Marjorie.

"Why, I—" she began.

Trale cut in, mouth quivering, eyes glistening with unshed tears. "She, *messieurs,*" he groaned, "is—was—my fiancée. An American girl named Marjorie Storm." He paused, then burst out, "Oh, *messieurs,* have pity. She did not mean to kill that swine," he pointed dramatically to the dead body. "The man betrayed her."

His voice died away on a silence that no one immediately broke. Marjorie stared at him, her mouth open. *Madame* de Tolbert actually started, and her hand went to her mouth as she shook convulsively. The benign face of John Carloff looked incredulous.

The astonished police officer finally said, "You say that she killed *Monsieur le Vicomte?*"

Trale's shoulders rose and fell. "Yes." His voice cracked. "The man had made love to her, you perceive, *messieurs.* He had said he was free, and mad to marry her. He brought her here, to-night. They were together, you understand. And *Madame* de Tolbert, his legal wife, suspecting his mischief followed him, entered and confronted them. Poor Marjorie!" he sighed. "She lost her head."

"And how is it that you are here, *monsieur?*" asked the police.

"I—" Trale thrust out his arms, palms outward— "I loved Marjorie, *messieurs.* Madly, devotedly. I came here, hoping to show her that *Vicomte* de Tolbert was a swine. But I—I arrived too late."

One of the policement drew Marjorie away and got between her and the door. The other stared around, then bent over the corpse.

MADAME de Tolbert flashed a glance at Trale. "Why, you—I—"

"Do you wish to confess?" Trale politely asked her in rapid, barely coherent English.

"How dare you?" she cried.

"Listen." Trale smiled thinly. "I know this set-up. That badger game is old stuff. You were hired by von Krieger to keep Carloff from leaving the country. This murder is a frame-up, and if you don't keep your mouth shut now, I'll put you in a gold frame and turn you in."

It was a bluff, and Marjorie knew it even as she knew why Trale had accused her of the crime. To charge *Madame* de Tolbert would involve John Carloff and keep him from leaving the country the next noon. But apparently *Madame* de Tolbert didn't fathom it, for she shivered and stayed silent.

The officer stood up, holding the handkerchief and the brooch. "Do these belong to you, *mademoiselle?*"

She glanced at Trale. His eyes spoke.

"Yes," she said. "We struggled. They are mine."

The two police agents exchanged expressive glances. Marjorie was only half listening as they questioned *Madame* de Tolbert. She heard, without emotion, the woman bear out Trale's hasty story, saw the policeman write the gist of it in a notebook. She heard John Carloff stutter and hesitate, and heard Trale save a nasty situation by declaring that Carloff had arrived with him. Trale acted his part to perfection.

It was, she thought, a scheme of genius to free Carloff from the police. Finally, one of the *agents de police* said to Trale, "You will, of course, give your testimony to the examining magistrate?"

"I will," sighed Trale. "I must. But gentlemen—" he paused, his eyes pleading with them— "if I have helped justice this night, might I ask one small favor in return?"

"That, *monsieur,* depends. What is it?"

"A moment alone with this woman whom I loved—still love."

The *agent de police* touched his peaked cap as if in salute to such nobleness. He escorted the other two to the next room. Here, Trale said in English, "Keep your mouth shut and sit tight.

Don't answer any questions. It's not so bad as it looks."

"I don't see how it could be," she remarked coolly.

"I kidnaped von Krieger to-night," he went on hurriedly, "and I can always swap him for you. He cooked up this murder."

"You could have told me," she said half angrily, "what you intended."

"No time," protested Trale. "If I framed the woman, she would tell her pre-arranged story and drag Carloff in. Even if he wasn't accused of murder, he'd have to stay as a material witness. And he's got to be in Zara the day after to-morrow."

"You'll have to surrender the real killer to get me out," she said.

Trale's eyes laughed while his face remained sober. "Let's leave that to von Krieger." He paused, frowned. "One thing is certain—von Krieger knows who it is. If von Krieger wasn't my prisoner, I'd say he might have done it himself."

Trale's eyes were thoughtful.

"Well, if this is my job," she sighed, "call the cop."

"Stout girl." Trale grinned. "You won't find the Woman's Prison so bad. And I'll pass some francs where they'll do the most good, and that'll make it easy."

He paused, then thrust his head forward. "Kiss me," he muttered. "It'll have a good effect. Then squeeze a small tear."

Her warm lips pressed against his. Trale made a rumbling sound in his throat that might be anything. She turned to the *agent de police*, with tears glistening on her cheeks.

"I am ready, *monsieur*," she sobbed.

Trale watched her walk, without haste, between the two *agents de police*. "Not bad," he muttered. "Not bad at all."

CHAPTER IV

A Woman Betrays!

BORIS DAVIGNY, his spade beard ragged and bloody, lay there, trussed up like a fowl for roasting. The reek of chloroform whistled through his dried, cracked lips.

Barney Trale swore softly under his breath. If it wasn't one thing, it was six, in this business. He turned to the moody, depressed John Carloff.

"Grab his legs," he ordered. "We've got to take him to a hospital. Furthermore, we've got to find a hiding place until to-morrow noon."

Carloff gave a little start. "Why?" he asked. His impressive face did not change expression as he stooped to lift Davigny's thin shanks.

"Because that red-haired dame you fell for will tip the French where we are," growled Trale. He straightened up under his burden. "God, why couldn't you have had sense enough to steer clear of women until we reached Zara?"

With a thump, John Carloff dropped his end of the thin man. "I love Francine." His voice was hoarse. "For as little as that"—he snapped his fingers — "I'd stay here with her."

"Sweet Buddah!" groaned Trale. "Isn't it enough that you have—"

His teeth clicked on the sentence and cut it off. The door knob was moving, rattling, the highlights changing on its polished surface. A rapping followed that had the sinister sound of authority. Trale swore in utter exasperation.

"*Monsieur* Trale!" spoke an angry voice. "Open, in the name of France."

Barney Trale's head turned, and his eyes swept the room. There was a closet on the right, a place where wraps and sticks and umbrellas were kept. His fierce gaze swept back to Carloff. He gestured peremptorily, and the Dalmatian stooped hurriedly. Between them, they carried Davigny to the closet, swiftly stuffed him within and closed the door. Trale settled his collar, and his eyes commanded Carloff to sit down in the salon. He himself went to the door.

Opening it, he perceived a fat, moustached man wearing a cutaway coat and the expression of petty officialdom that French office holders always have. Behind him stood a narrow, small man, obviously a detective.

"You," said the official, "are *Monsieur* Trale?"

"Come in," assented Trale. "This is an unexpected pleasure, *monsieur.*"

"I doubt," retorted he of the big moustaches, "that we are a pleasure, but nevertheless, we are here."

He strode in and gave John Carloff a brief bow. "I am Leon Duchenau of the Quai d'Orsay," he said. "And I am here on business—late as the hour is, I repeat, on business.

"Really?" Trale's voice drawled the word.

"Precisely. Word has come to us from unimpeachable sources that you are an American agent seeking to place *Monsieur* Carloff at the head of Dalmatia." The man paused importantly, blew his nose with a trumpeting sound, then went on. "It is quite possible that John Carloff would make a fine leader of a republic. We are not concerned with that. But that France's neutrality in the Balkans should be violated by a *coup d'état* starting here, to create a revolution in Dalmatia, is an impossibility."

"Really?" repeated Trale.

"Exactly." The official glared. "The diplomatic consequences would hurt France. Hence, we forbid you to leave France."

Trale's eyes grew bitter. Never, he thought, had a man been assailed from so many sides at once.

"We are free citizens," he protested.

"You are conspirators," growled Duchenau. "If Carloff is made president without entangling France, we shall recognize his government. In the meantime, we wish your paroles of honor that you will not leave France without our permission."

"And if we refuse?"

"You will be placed in forcible detention—in short, *monsieur*, in jail!"

Trale looked at the detective, knew there were more outside, and also realized that from this minute forward, the French Dieuxième Bureau would have spies trail them, report their every moment.

Thoughtfully, he extracted a cigarette and lit it. "*Monsieur*," he said, "such incredible rumors are without foundation in fact. Keep us under surveillance, by all means." He paused, exhaling a thin stream of smoke. "And you can accept my parole that we shall not leave France without properly notifying the French government of our intentions," he said solemnly.

"That will suffice," said *Monsieur* Duchenau. He looked haughtily down his nose. "And let me say that our aviation squadrons along the Italian border have been warned to shoot down any unregistered, uncleared airplane." He tipped his hat, got up and went to the door. "*Monsieur*, I wish you *au revoir.*"

BARNEY TRALE slammed the door after him, locked it, and hurled the cigarette furiously in the general direction of the fireplace.

"This is getting to be a honey," he muttered.

He walked restlessly around the vast salon of John Carloff's house and gave thought. Without doubt, *Madame* de Tolbert had tipped the police of the murder; and had warned the Foreign Office of the projected spectacular flight to a revolution. And the Foreign Office, remembering what had happened after Prince Carol of Rumania had done the same identical thing, were going to stop this.

Carloff said, "I'm going to see Francine."

Trale whirled. "You're going to what? My God, don't you know she's as crooked as her hair?"

"I love her," cried Carloff passionately. "If she did this, it was only to keep me from—"

"Spare me the sob stuff," interrupted Trale. He moodily paced to the fire and back again.

"Well," he muttered, "Davigny stays here. If he dies, it'll be too bad. You and I have got to go."

"Where?" demanded Carloff.

"You're flying to Zara to-night."

Trale got Davigny out of the closet, loaded him like a sack of oats on his

shoulders, put him in a bedroom and covered him up. "I'll phone a hospital from the flying field," he decided.

He found John Carloff white and furious. "I won't go to Zara without Francine," he cried. "Am I to be a damned puppet, moved about without regard to myself? I am a partiot. I wish well of your country and would save mine. But, my God, I am also a man."

Trale slowly walked up to the statesman. His hand snapped out and jerked John Carloff's shoulder. "By God," he muttered, "I've had enough. What you do with *Madame* de Tolbert after you're president of Dalmatia is your business. Getting you there is mine. If you've forgotten your duty to your people, I haven't. Come along."

The man with the benign face shivered, then shrugged helplessly. "My duty!" he muttered. "The harvest of a lifetime of effort. Yes, I must go."

Barney Trale's face softened. "Your happiness will come later," he murmured gently.

Trale put on his hat and they went in silence down the walk to the street. Trale felt for a small blackjack which he always carried. He was transferring it to his right-hand jacket pocket when a figure staggered out of the blackness and came reeling up to him.

"Skipper," choked a voice.

"Neetch!" muttered Trale. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"Von Krieger," Neetch rasped hoarsely. "He got away from Evreux."

Barney Trale stood perfectly still, and a breath, held pendant in his throat, escaped in a little sigh of sound.

"Von Krieger got away," he repeated. "How?"

"Skipper, we was followed. You hadn't been gone ten minutes, and I was just curlin' up to look at a paper when something lit on my head and I was out cold. I snapped out of it and found myself in the cellar and tied up. I shook off the ropes and beat it here. They'd come and got von Krieger and beat it."

He continued to talk, explaining in detail, but Barney Trale wasn't listening. Von Krieger was gone. That was all that counted. The man he was going to trade for Marjorie Storm was out of his reach, but she was still in jail.

He perceived almost at once the decision that was thrust upon him. The decision he had to make—and at once. He could go on with Carloff, elude the French and von Krieger's men and try to reach Zara at once. Or he could neglect his duty and start now after von Krieger, to wrest from the German the truth about Raoul de Tolbert's murder, and thus release Marjorie Storm from prison and the charge of murder hanging over her.

Desperately, he wanted to go after von Krieger. He had used Marjorie Storm and he should help her. But to delay meant that the revolution in Zara would fail. Through his own efforts, his country's foreign policy in the Balkans would be ruined.

He stood a long time, his fingers drumming a tattoo on the lapel of his top coat. He looked out at his car, standing there with the alert Pierre behind the wheel. Suddenly his hand thrust out and grabbed John Carloff's arm.

"Come on, Neetch," he said. "We've got a date at Orly Field."

THE car drew away from the curb with a whine of spinning gears and with rapidly increasing speed hurried toward the Porte Maillot. Looking back, Trale nodded his head grimly as he saw a smaller car, but an equally fast one, hanging stubbornly in pursuit, less than four hundred yards behind. He ordered Pierre to make twists and turns in the various small streets of the old city, but they could not shake off the pursuer. Trale had never thought they could.

Curtly, he gave the order to make a roundabout swing through the Forêt de Fontainbleau. At this time of night, the seldom-used road would have little, if any, traffic.

They droned on, the radiance of the headlights cutting a swathe of brilliance through a dark, moonless night. Trale knew the plane was ready for an imme-

diate take-off and had been for days, waiting the precise word when the *coup* could succeed. He watched the car in the rear. It never varied its position, and its headlights were boldly fixed on Trale's car.

They came, presently, to a dark section where the tree limbs met over the road in a sort of green tunnel.

"Stop the car," said Trale. He took out his blackjack. "Take this gun, Neetch, but only use the butt of it." He handed over the weapon, barrel-first.

Neetch took the gun and said nothing. John Carloff shifted uneasily as the car braked to a halt. "What do you—"

"Wait," snarled Trale. He saw that the car behind had stopped about a hundred yards distant.

Trale flung open the limousine door, jerked John Carloff out and fell to rolling on the pavement with him. "Jump me, Neetch," he jerked, "and make it look good."

He gave a hoarse scream, a good imitation of a man in terror, Neetch jumped on him, and in a second they were rolling around the macadam road-surface, plainly illuminated by the rear car's headlights. John Carloff played the part and called earnestly for help.

As the three ruined their clothes on the macadam's gummy surface, the car behind howled into gear, came streaking up and disgorged two men who raced forward shouting, *"Arrêtez!"*

The one reached down and caught Trale's shoulder and jerked him upright. "I arrest you—" he started in French. His teeth bit off the sentence with a vicious click as Trale's fist hooked to his jaw. As he staggered back, Trale's blackjack made a dull thud of sound against his skull.

"Get the other one, Neetch," said Trale.

"Aidez!" cried the other one, and then Neetch's pistol butt caught him, and he went down, where another blow laid him silent beside his comrade.

Trale staggered upright under the weight of one. He walked to the wood's edge and heaved the man in. Neetch and the shaken John Carloff carried the other detective.

"What in God's name does this mean?" cried Carloff.

"We needed about three hours' start," Trale explained moodily, "and these dicks were assigned to follow. Now, there's no one to follow. Come on, let's wheel the Citro of theirs off the road."

They started back toward the car whose motor still throbbed. They walked into the blinding glare of the headlights —so that the attack took them by surprise.

As Barney Trale stepped to the side of the car, two dark shadows materialized with extraordinary swiftness almost under his nose. His hand streaked for his gun, but he never drew it. He warded off one blow, but the two men fell upon him with ferocity. Blows rained on his unprotected face and head. He struck back, seeking furiously to wrest a hand loose to get the gun.

"Neetch!" he yelled.

"Help," screamed John Carloff.

A hand rose and fell before Barney Trale's face. The blow struck truly, and he pitched forward on his face.

ERICH VON KRIEGER lit a cigarette and pushed it between Barney Trale's lips. "You take a lot of stopping," he said.

Barney Trale inhaled. The smoke tasted dry, and hurt. "How about some water?" he asked.

His head ached furiously. He was shaken all over. And particularly his side hurt where some one had evidently kicked him. The German with the heavy face got some water and tilted the glass so that Trale could drink. Instinctively reaching for the glass, Barney found he was securely tied. The cool liquid refreshed him.

"Thanks," he said. "I never thought you were following the French dicks."

Von Krieger put the cigarette back in Barney Trale's mouth. The smoke tasted better now.

"I knew you were clever enough to get rid of the police," said von Krieger

coldly, "but not clever enough to escape me."

"No," said Trale. "How's Carloff and Neetch?"

"They are here—and will stay here."

Von Krieger smiled, not pleasantly. There was a cold-blooded, ruthless look about him that Trale didn't like. Trale frowned uneasily. He had made a mess of things surely. Marjorie Storm was in prison. John Carloff was held prisoner by von Krieger until it would be too late to make a successful *coup*.

"You've got the aces, von Krieger," he said.

Barney Trale looked around the place. From the silence, and the luxurious appearance of the place, he knew he was in von Krieger's St. Cloud house, from which he had abducted the German agent.

Von Krieger saw the glance. "You'll be very comfortable here," he said jocosely.

"So you escaped from Neetch ten minutes after I left," mused Tarel. "I wonder if it was you who took a pot shot at Marjorie and killed Raoul de Tolbert."

"What difference does it make?" asked von Krieger.

"Not much," admitted Trale. "I'm just trying to fit an idea together."

He paused, then added, "You see, von Krieger, Raoul de Tolbert was an agent of yours, and I don't see why you killed him even to frame John Carloff."

"The information would be useless to you," said von Krieger. "King Orliv will still remain dictator of Dalmatia."

"I was thinking of Marjorie Storm," said Trale.

The German burst into a thundering roar of laughter. "You placed her in that *boite*." He shook with laughter. "A *Dumkopf*—you."

"I guess you're right." Trale sighed.

Von Krieger, still laughing, went to the door. "I hope your reflections won't be too odious." He smiled cunningly. "American agents are all fools and blunderers."

He slammed the door and Barney Trale was alone.

After a while, Trale gave a few inquisitive pulls at his bonds, found them secure and lay quietly. His thoughts were not pleasant. He'd put that game girl in a spot where the guillotine might sever her pretty head from her body. He had lost out in his major task of installing a new government in Dalmatia. He swore softly. "I have tough luck in clusters," he muttered.

He gave another tug at the bonds, but he only skinned his wrists to no purpose. Then he lay silent, trying to figure a way out.

Ten minutes later, the door on the right opened, and *Madame* de Tolbert came in. Trale watched her through half shut eyes, wondering what she wanted. Her face was pale, her eyes distrait. Looking at her pallid expression of suffering, Barney Trale took a long chance.

"Heard the news already?" he asked.

"Wh-what?" She was very nervous.

"Don't stall." Trale laughed harshly. "You are to take the rap for murdering your husband. Von Krieger's going to toss you to the police hounds."

If he expected amazement and fear, he was disappointed. "Could you kill von Krieger?" she asked unexpectedly.

TRALE caught himself just in time. "Nothing," he said mockingly, "would give me greater pleasure."

"Could you?" she insisted, and he suddenly knew she was in deadly earnest.

"Why?" he countered.

"He's going to murder Carloff." Her eyes were blazing. "He's afraid as long as Carloff is alive there's a chance of a successful revolt. There is a big democratic group in Dalmatia." Her voice thickened with tears.

"But von Krieger couldn't get away with murdering Carloff," said Trale.

"He can. And will." She was shivering, although the place was warm enough. "I heard him talking about it just now to one of his men. You are both to die."

Trale whistled off-key through his teeth. He saw now why his own bluff

had been almost unheard by her. She knew too much.

"What did he say?" asked Trale.

"He told the man that by the scheme—whatever it was—both your deaths would appear as accidents."

Trale thought this over. A secret agent has to take his life in his two hands. If he loses it, there is no one to protest, for the United States Secret Service gives no credit to success, no help to failure.

"Why do you tell me this?" he asked finally.

"Because I love Carloff," she whispered fiercely. "Five months ago when Erich sent me to make a fool of the man, I thought I was immune to love." Her lips curled. "God knows I've seen enough of men. In Carloff, I found joy. I found a great patriot, a great soul."

"Then why did you pull that stunt yesterday?" demanded Trale. "You knew Carloff would be arrested."

"I did it," she cried, "because I didn't want Carloff to go to Dalmatia. He'd have to leave me, abandon me. And I couldn't stand it, I tell you. And Erich told me that Carloff would merely be detained—that nothing would happen to him."

"And you believed him?" Trale shook his head wearily.

"Yes, God help me. I wanted to believe him, to keep Carloff to myself. Now, I know it was all part of the plan to kill Carloff. Living, he is a menace to Dalmatian Nazis."

She spoke the truth, and Barney Trale knew it. "Unfasten these ropes," he said.

She took a step, paused. "He'll kill me if he finds out. You've got to kill von Krieger."

"I can't do it tied up," said Trale, watching her narrowly.

Her fingers picked at the knots, and they fell away. Barney Trale stood up, rubbing the stiffness out of his wrists. His chest hurt and so did his head.

"A break at last," he muttered. "Got a gun?"

She reached into her dress and gave him a short-nosed revolver. Trale examined it and gave her a sharp look. Then he put it into his shoulder holster.

"Now listen," he said gently. "I don't doubt you love Carloff. But he's got to go back to Dalmatia. That's in the cards. When he's president, I don't see why he can't marry you. It's been done before."

She nodded. "I suppose so. I was a fool to play von Krieger's game. But Raoul worked for him, and von Krieger paid me money. I've been a spy for him. If I didn't do what he ordered, he would betray me to the French. That's why he must die."

"You'll stand for Carloff's going back to Dalmatia?"

"I must." Her head drooped. "I'll go with him."

"All right," said Trale. "Now—" he laid back on the pallet— "do those knots again—loosely. They'll come in and go through with their scheme. You'll have to stay here and take your chances until I can get back to you. Do you understand?"

"Perhaps you won't come back." She was afraid again.

"I've got to come back," he told her. "Somebody must be turned over to the French for the murder of your husband."

She gave a start, relaxed. "You know best," she said dully. "I must trust you. He—"

She went out of the room without finishing the sentence. Barney Trale lay there without moving. . . .

CHAPTER V

The Death Flight

TWENTY minutes later, two men led by von Krieger entered, picked him up and bore him out into the coolness of the bright morning. He saw now that he was on the extensive flat lawn of a fine estate. Not far away was an airplane, a cabin job, with the propeller turning. Two other men joined them, carrying John Carloff, who was bound and gagged.

Von Krieger motioned to a helmeted

man who had a parachute pack on his back. To him, von Krieger talked briefly. The man nodded and went to the plane.

Von Krieger said thinly to Trale, "I hope you enjoy your ride."

Trale sighed. "You think of everything, von Krieger. It will be a pleasure some day to take a lasting poke at you."

"You struck me once—me, a von Krieger," said the German. "I do not forget nor forgive. Put him aboard, Otto."

Without further waste of time, Barney Trale and John Carloff were placed in the two passenger seats of the plane. The pilot up forward locked the door from the inside. The idling motor burst into a sudden fury of sound. Exhaust flames flickered from the stack. The plane began to move. The tail came up, and the wheels bounced over the rough grass. Then there was no more bumping, and the clump of trees ahead passed beneath them.

At once, Barney Trale began working at the loose knots. By the time the plane had climbed a thousand feet or so, he was free and had the gun in his hand, watching the pilot's face.

The pilot was studying his compass. The ship continued to climb. Presently, off the right wing, Trale could see the latticed pillar of the Eiffel Tower, and the spires of the Trocadero. From that, Trale oriented himself rapidly, and made up his mind about what he intended to do. He cast a quick glance at John Carloff. The man's face was sad, but unafraid.

Then the immediate action of the pilot called Trale's attention. The loud drone of the motor suddenly ceased. The pilot set the stick with a little noose over it, unfastened the safety belt and climbed out of the seat. He started for the little door. His right hand came across his body to the left side and took hold of a little ring dangling from a cord. He looked at John Carloff, and then at Trale, and smiled mirthlessly.

"*Hals und beinbruch,*" he roared in German. It was an old German war salutation meaning, "May you break your arms and legs."

His left hand reached out for the door. His purpose was apparent. He was leaping out with his parachute while the plane glided evenly under its momentum. Barney Trale had an idea that after the plane had crashed, one of von Krieger's men would arrive at the wreckage, remove the ropes, possibly thrust Barney Trale near the pilot's seat. And a report of accidental death while unlawfully trying to leave France was inevitable.

"Not bad," he thought admiringly.

The pilot's fingers fumbled at the door. The plane gave a sickening little drop as it lost way.

Barney Trale put forward the gun snout and said in German, "Get back into the seat."

Still keeping the gun trained, he got up and moved forward. The pilot's face turned pale, green, and his jaw sagged. Suddenly he jerked at the plane door in a frantic impulse to hurl himself out.

BARNEY TRALE very carefully put a slug in the door within inches of the pilot's hand.

"Back to your seat," he repeated. "And go where I say."

Conflicting expressions—fear, hatred, cunning—distorted the pilot's face. Then he backed up like a crab and got into his seat. The motor roared; the plane came out of the semi-spin it had dropped into, and flew on a steady course.

Trale, the gun snout in the pilot's back, leaned over and yelled, "Take us back to Orly Field."

Guiding by Eiffel Tower, he saw the plane's nose veer, and in fifteen minutes the oldest French flying field came under the right wing. He nudged the pilot and they spiraled toward the checkered green of the field. Looking down, Barney Trale saw the big, three-motored Fokker standing at the south end of the field. He poked the gun and gestured.

The pilot, white-faced, nodded and set his own plane down within two hundred yards and taxied the rest of the distance. A man trotted out from the Fokker—Mike Flaherty, the pilot. Trale backed

up to where John Carloff sat and unbound him. It was just eleven o'clock.

"Come on," he said gently. "History is paging you."

As he led John Carloff from the cabin, he said to the German pilot, "You come along, too, I can use you later."

Mike Flaherty touched his hat, grinning. "I thought you'd be around, Trale."

"I'm not going," rejoined Trale. "You and Burke can land *Monsieur* Carloff in Zara by to-morrow noon."

"Easy as shooting fish in a barrel." Flaherty nodded. "And if the fight's public, we'll take a hand."

Trale smiled mirthlessly and told of the French warning. "You'd better go by way of Switzerland. You've got time."

He turned to John Carloff. "Good-bye, *monsieur*," he said. "If you make a good president, I'll feel all my crimes justified."

Carloff's face worked. "Francine—I love her, Trale. Bring her to me. My God, life owes me something."

"It does," said Trale gently. "I'll take care of her."

Carloff suddenly took Trale's arm. "My thanks," he said brokenly. "You are a great man, Trale. Bring her to me, and you will find me grateful."

He strode rapidly to the Fokker, and Trale watched the big plane made ready. "The gratitude of the great," he muttered. "Just what is it?"

He shoved the gun at the German pilot. "Back to von Krieger," he ordered. "I've lots yet to do."

The cabin plane, with the German pilot at the stick, skimmed down to a three-point landing not five hundred yards from the great château. The pilot cut the switch. He turned, and through the sudden stillness after the motor roar his voice was loud.

"Von Krieger will kill me for this," he said flatly.

"I doubt it," said Trale. "Get up."

The man did so. Trale took no chances. The muzzle of his gun drew a metallic streak through the air as he struck. Square on the chin the steel thudded, and the pilot went back and down with a strange croaking sound.

"So far, so good," said Barney Trale.

Rapidly, now, he stripped the pilot of the parachute pack, got off the man's heavy flying suit, the helmet and the goggles. These he put on, and after binding the pilot to the safety-belt braces, strode swiftly across the velvety lawn to the Norman house which reared its white-washed points into a cloudless sky.

THE unlocked door opened before his thrust. He entered an empty hallway. He pulled the wool top of the flying suit over his chin, pushed the goggles down over his eyes and walked rapidly toward the staircase. He finally came upon an aproned man with long Hindenberg mustaches.

"Ah, you fool, Karl," this man cried. "You failed to do as the *Excellenz* ordered, and you will pay for it."

"Huh!" grunted Trale.

"He is in there." The man pointed. "And you are to go to him at once. What became of the two swine you were to dispose of?"

Trale was close, and the way the man stood he was a perfect mark for a right hook. Trale let his right fist go, caught the man, and lowered him gently to the floor. He blew on his bruised knuckles and continued on to the room.

He heard von Krieger's angry voice even before he opened the door into a windowless, electrically lit room.

"Am I surrounded by fools or traitors or both?" he was yelling. "You helped that swine Trale. And I'll kill you for it. You—" he broke off, wheeled swiftly as Barney Trale entered.

"Ah," he muttered. "Now we'll have the truth of it. Why did you not carry out my orders, Karl? The men have been waiting for the crash nearly an hour."

Barney Trale pushed up the goggles, and presented the pistol snout for von Krieger's contemplation.

"Karl is resting," he rejoined calmly.

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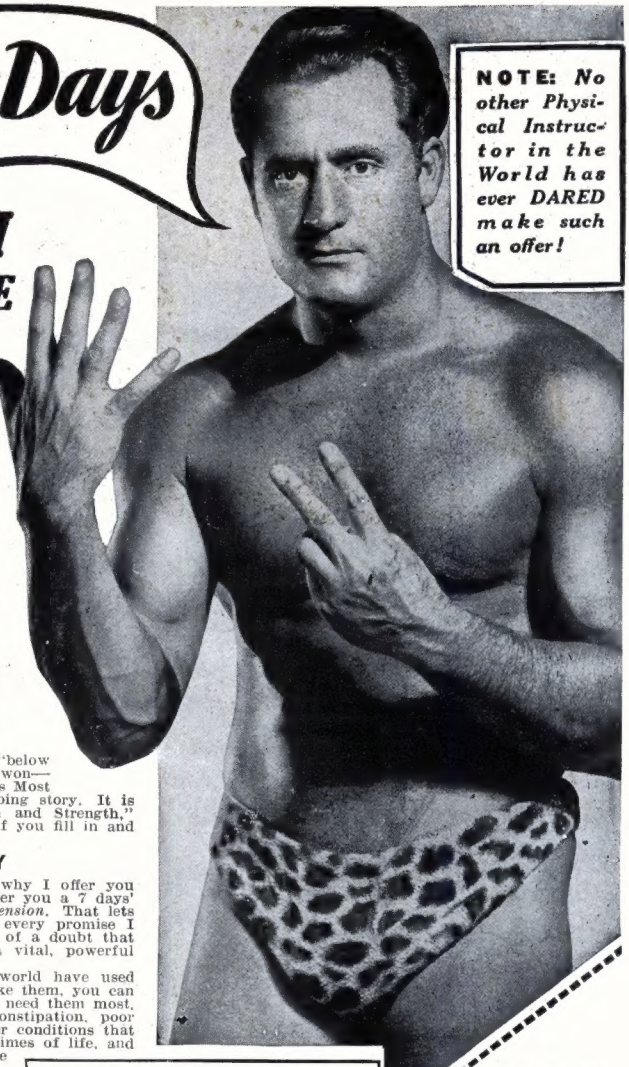

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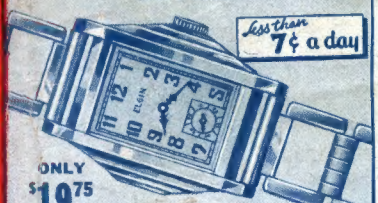

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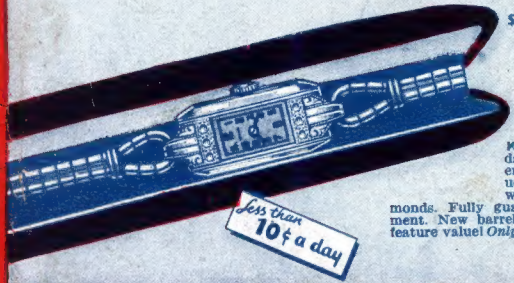

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